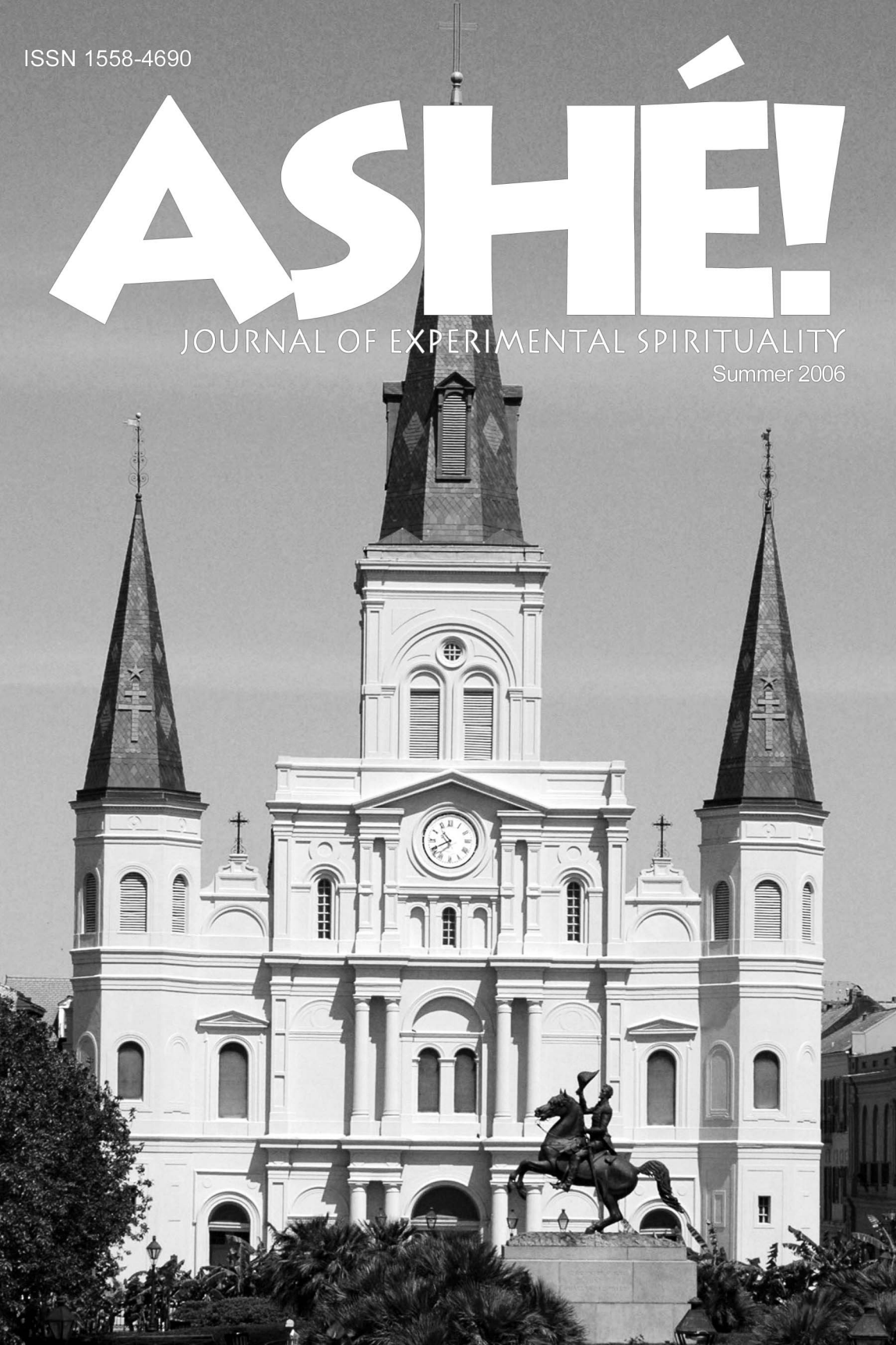


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ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

Summer 2006





Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, Nine Months After Katrina

Photo: Sandra O'Claire

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Spooky Tricks

Jason Louv

They bring you down here into the World from the Outside and then they teach you the Words, and by that time you've already begun to forget magic. Sometimes it tries to come back to you, puts on the mask of an imaginary friend and calls to you from across the schoolyard where they teach you lessons in self and submission. You can see the other place, the one where they know your true name, the place that this



is only a reflection of, when you close your eyes. It slides by in strange dreams, sometimes comes out through scribbles in the margins of your schoolwork, but then they teach you the word Imagination. And it is not a real word. And it is not real. Welcome to the World.

You grow up in front of the television, you grow up in front of the blackboard, you grow up wrapped in the black coils of the dragon, dumb, forgetful. *When I grow up I'm going to be a princess. When I grow up I'm going*

to be a fireman. I'm going to be an astronaut. I'm going to be a ballerina. Every day of your life they teach you to forget your birthright. Hormones kick in and your body goes haywire with lust, hope, dreams, terrors. *When I grow up I'm going to be on MTV. I'm going to be in the NBA. I'm going to be president of the USA.* On the edge of town you sit on a hill with friends looking down at the twinkling houses, tossing beer cans down into the darkness, heart already grown hard. *When I grow up I'm going to get out of here.* Go walking for hours with your hands in your pockets, staring at the ground, trying to remember something. There was something you forgot. Something you can almost remember, but not quite, just on the periphery, an impossible itch. If you could just remember, everything would be different, you know it . . . The specter of Real Life hangs over you, cleverly named, as if nothing but the forty-hour work week was actually real. All the toys and dreams must be put away now. You didn't *really think* you were special, did you?

When I grow up I'm going to take what I get and learn to fucking like it.

Did we forget something? Best not to think about it, really. Best to get on with life. After all, *everybody knows* that there is no such thing as magic, and what you see is always what you get. And so you become an adult, by sole virtue of the number of years you have lived. You look for a place to glue yourself into the jigsaw, and you have already forgotten how to hear.

And magic crouches in the barren tree outside your locked window and slowly taps all night, saying, play with me, play with me.

Or maybe it doesn't get that far. Maybe you'll find it. Maybe you'll start to take it all seriously, the things that the skewed maladjusted out-caste kids talk about on the fringes of the schoolyard. It starts with that book you find in the back of the public library, the one about magic, *real* magic, that you read secretly under the table in math class. Or it starts with the voices that begin to come. Or with a certain certainty of unknown origin. And one day it makes perfect sense (how long have you been looking

for it?), and you try it. Try to do something to reality. And it works. And as your hope grows, you watch the lilting fingers of Hell brush across the people in the school, dragging them down into gray mundanity, addiction, slavery, pregnancy, locked tight into the roles that have been constructed for them, and you realize that if there's any magic in this world that you'll have to work for it harder than anything else you could ever work for, in order to never become like that, gray-eyed, dead to the world's mystery, chained to this waking-nightmare blood-trailing terror we call "real life."

In the back of the class staring at them in disbelief we realize the violence of this planet, that will eat us whole if given half the chance. We come to the Vision of Sorrow and realize that hell exists, it is right beside us always. It waits to swallow us raw.

And in the name of Chaos do you rise against the Beast and declare yourself a crazy little child who disbelieves in it all and you know that this is enough.

We disbelieve in your shadowplay adult world that you create from paper and ink and flashing screens to convince us that we are powerless, saying over and over "this is the way things are, things are, this is the way things are."

And you call yourself a magician because if this is reality then you will make something unreal of yourself, and the more absurd the better. And this is how we begin to discover the true order of things, and how we discover our true elders, and our true names. And how we begin to see how much we truly have to learn.

And cast into the wilderness beyond this fearful culture's walls you wander and explore, mind reeling, chattering to yourself. In the whited-out forests you glance your fear around the edge of a tree. And this hoodoo magic madness is real after all. It chases you, hounds you to the ends. At night they come to you in your dreams and show you the way, and you wander alone and

crazy and full of it all, until you begin to find the tracks of others in the sand. As night falls you look for the glow of their fires. And then one day you find them.

And that's where the real magic begins.

THE PURE AND VIOLENT MENTATION OF THE ALL

The quest for “magic,” which, in the end, may just be a word, has led me into some fairly odd places for a dorky kid from the suburbs to find himself in. The act of declaring myself a “magician” when I was seventeen, just for the sheer what-the-fuckness of it, to see if I could actually become something that wasn't supposed to exist, seemed to prompt such a response from the universe that despite the fact I was thoroughly convinced there was no such thing as magic, I shortly found myself spending hours constructing ornate after-school rituals, speaking to discarnate entities in the woods, hexing reality to get out of detention and entering a bizarre, newly meaningful version of reality lush with symbol, juxtaposition, telepathic impressions, and rhymes and puns of experience itself. In college I pored through tens of thousands of pages of occult literature, trying to suss out the wisdom of the ages, figuring out how everything else stood in relation to it, uncovering a secret history to things; tried my hand at using drugs and sex to provoke occult insight; tracked down and interrogated at length every “magician” I could find, which included most of my heroes. Spent every moment learning to control my mind, to direct my will and imagination. At a certain point it became hard to pretend it was a game any longer, when “real” life seemed like the game now, the simple and plain mask to wear over the endlessly reflecting, recombining, joyous self, each new feint at the mystery opening a new ravine of potential and kinetic experience.

I took myself apart and put myself back together, stripping away every lie I could find, every lie about how things were or how I was supposed to be or what magic was, over and over and over and over again, searching frantically for whatever could possibly be hiding underneath it all, until it felt like there was nothing left. I talked to spirits. I talked to demons. I talked to Gods.

Well. It's an adventure. Might be the last one going. Might be the only one that was ever going. Imagine my surprise when I found out that instead of securing myself a ticket to the little white room where they feed you little yellow pills, I had instead found my entryway to a whole 'nother zone, a golden temple deep in the jungle with only the faintest signs and paths leading to it away from the main roads, inhabited by crowds of people who were wondering what had taken me so long.

So I rode the synchronicities to New York City and the next thing I knew I was editing this book, since the opportunity just up and presented itself, and then ended up in London holed up finishing school and assembling the book and trying to figure out what the fuck had happened to me. Still haven't really pieced that last one together, to be honest.

I found myself gathered with the others in the back of dark pubs plotting out the future.

I found myself dancing all night on the moors with witches on mushrooms and DMT, peering into the realm of the dead and into the "future"; and watching the Aeon flow begin to turn this world into exactly what it needs to be, and right on time too.

I found myself crunching the numbers, crunching the gematria, scouring the sacred books, rolling up my sleeves and *doing* the magic way more than I ever had before, for hours and hours every day, sometimes all day, scratching around the numinous until it all exploded in the bliss and truth of Ma'at.

I followed it across Europe; to the Roman ruins that only looked like they'd fallen yesterday; to the Vatican where I poured my blood into the fountains of holy water; to the old city of Prague where they made the golem and where Vin Diesel made *XXX*.¹

I rode the maniacal shark of my desire from the dusty back corners of the library of my childhood all the way to the foothills of Mount Everest, and there, sitting in the dust watching the sun set over the ravines and valleys of Nepal, I sat with a girl reading a book a Tibetan lama had given me, helping her practice her English as she laboriously traced out a line with her finger and read it right back to my face:

“How can you suppose . . . to have sway . . . over others . . . if you do not . . . have sway . . . over your . . . own . . . mind?”

And so I found myself in India, sunburnt, walking among the oceanside shrines of Mumbai, stepping over the dying fly-covered children carpeting the city streets. I found myself in Goa, wandering the deserted beaches under gray skies, convinced I had found the edge of the world. I found myself sitting in Varanasi, every circuit burnt, watching bodies cremate on the Ganges for a week, staring at the vivid futurism of the skulls turning black, staring at the bloated bodies of sadhus floating down the river. I found myself on the back of a camel in the Great Thar Desert riding into the red sun, convinced I had found the edge of myself, consciousness turned into pure white noise. Camped in the middle of the sands in the middle of the night, staring at the crescent moon in the sky, right above my sleeping camel. It was a tarot card. It was perfect.

(And at this point a giant plastic Tao flies out of a portal and smacks our narrator in the yap, which he promptly shuts. We notice a “\$0.99 / Made in Taiwan” sticker on the back.)

Well. Magic. It sure is an adventure. Yes indeedy.

PROPOSITION ONE

The lowest-common-denominator definition of magic—that sticking pins in a voodoo doll will produce corresponding pains in the person it is a model of—contains the whole doctrine of ritual magic in miniature. Our nervous systems are our models of our universe—therefore, making changes to our nervous systems will produce corresponding changes in the universe, and vice versa.

PROPOSITION TWO

Spiders weave webs, beavers build dams and people make magic; they manifest meaning and structure from nothingness. The world is pure magic, it is the image of our DNA writ large in manifestation—it is our sigil and what we have chosen to make with our time. The *stupas* of Lhasa are no more magical than the infernal machinery of New York; it's all what we've chosen to bring forth from ourselves, it's all relative and it's all us.

HUNTING DUST

The following is a general theory of magical initiation drawn from my own personal experience, reading and interactions with other magicians. Though magic can never be fully described, as it is by definition beyond definitions, the following model seems to be a good fit for the initial stages.

From first learning to speak until the age of six or seven, children enter what Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget called the preoperational stage, more generally known as “magical thinking.” It is in this stage of development that the child believes that the universe is a manifestation of the self.

According to Dr. Benjamin Spock, “In a young child’s view, it is very possible that it rains because the sky is sad. If your baby brother gets sick and goes to the hospital, it could be your fault if you were mad at him the day before. If you want something very, very badly and it happens, then your wanting caused it to happen. These are examples of magical thinking. They are also examples of egocentric thinking—not that the young child is selfish. It’s just that he cannot take anyone else’s perspective, so that everything in the world revolves around him. When he’s sad, he cries. So, it must be that the sky does, too.”²

This state is characterized by the onset of symbolic thought, in which one thing can represent or correspond to another, and marked by the sense that everything, including inanimate objects, is alive and sentient, and capable of emotion and feeling.

Studying this mode of operation in animistic cultures conducting their affairs at the level of magical thinking,³ early anthropologist Sir James Frazer isolated the basic components of magic as the Law of Similarity—that like produces like, and that an effect resembles its cause (e.g., rehearsing a desired event in ritual will “cause” that event to happen in actuality); and the Law of Contact or Contagion—that anything that has once been in contact will remain in contact, no matter what the physical distance is (e.g., a person may be affected by actions taken towards their hair, nails or blood; or a corporation by its logo). It is on these principles that all sorcery is worked.⁴

The child experiences herself as awash in divinity, and partaking in divinity and the secret connections between things; and because of the limits of both her own cognitive development and those of monotheist cultures, which most developing children are unfortunately liable to find themselves in, she is unable to recognize that everybody else around her may be just as God-like.⁵

This state, of course, cannot be supported in a healthy environment as it prevents empathy or any kind of social ordering. If taken to its limits, magical thinking at this level—of totemic superstition and the presupposition that whatever one does is correct, because one is omnipotent and divine—will quickly end in the career of a serial killer or an American president.

The preoperational stage is quickly replaced by the concrete operational stage, in which the child begins to think logically and in organized patterns about concrete events, and loses the previous intuitive and egocentric focus. The joke is, though, that despite its social limitations, the preoperational stage may provide a much clearer picture of how the universe actually runs than its concrete and abstract operational successors, which are more concerned with how social interaction runs. (Compare, for instance, Frazer's Laws of Similarity and Contagion with Bell's Theorem, which shows that physical reality is non-local.)

It is only through the *loss* of magical thinking that one can fully individuate, and learn to work with other people and come to healthy functioning in modern society. Yet a loss it is, and if one were to find oneself dead-ended behind some anonymous checkout counter, stumbling home every night to find some kind of succor in lite beer and television, the only place left where magic is real, one could hardly be blamed for wondering exactly what it was that went amiss.

Which brings us to magic proper—as in that entertaining, sexy, meaningful, futuristic lifestyle we know and love.

Magicians tend to be people who couldn't quite let go of that childhood wonder, who never quite forgot that feeling of being less separate from their experience. These people often first seek to re-enchant their world, grown gray since childhood, with the tactical use of art, poetry, music, sex, drugs or some other mode of enflaming the imagination before

sensing the vast, hidden order of things which lies just beyond the imagination and the possible; the hidden order of which the imagination is a sensory organ for making exploratory forays into.

Magic, then, becomes a disciplined quest to recover the state of magical thinking and claim all of its eccentric treasures, and to break the chains of social conditioning and static personality that have made one less than imminently divine. Armed with the ability to live as a functional adult in “mundane reality,” the individual can now make a safe return to the doorstep of magical thinking, and reclaim the spark of divinity within them that, though likely a bit scuffed up by religion, education, media, processed junk food and the daily erosion of life on this planet, will provide no less of a nuclear incident when touched.

The reintegration of this outlook on life, along with the more stable viewpoint, then becomes the initial task of the budding magician—that is, making space for magic itself to manifest, and gaining a foothold in that other place. Reintegration is *not* an easy task. One largely has to go against everything one has been taught about the world; one has to find a way of safely unlearning the neat boundaries that have been placed around the possible. The multitudes of magical training systems that abound in the world represent general, customizable guidelines for doing this.

The crucial difference between the original state of magical thinking and the new one of magical action is that the individual is able to conceive of a universe in which all are God, though some may be forgetful of this;⁶ and in which all is One in infinite diversity. The newborn magician has empathy, and as such is able to find the appropriate ends to direct their efforts towards. *And magic works.* The magician has returned to the childhood world of wonder, awe and magic, with all the organizational and emotional skills of the adult. He has gazed upon the face of God and found hir not to be a commanding, authoritarian legislator but instead a

constantly growing, learning and exploring androgynous child on an adventure—"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (*Matthew 18:3*)

This is the first synthesis; this is where it starts. When one gains access to the magical world, a slipstream which lies just one inch beyond the possible,⁷ in a world only a child, crazy person or Artist would so dare to believe in, one will quickly find that the game takes on a life of its own.

I SWEAR THEY HAD A SHAVED HORSE DANCING ON THE STAGE WITH THEM

"Casting a magic spell" is easy. The basic mechanism goes like this: You decide what you want (this is often the hardest part)! You make that desire as precise as you possibly can, and make sure that it has a route for manifestation. You then make a *symbolic representation* of that desire occurring—a mantra, a hand movement, a dance, a piece of art or music, or a simple symbol on a piece of paper. Some form of trance state is then entered—through prolonged sex, certain drugs, dancing, meditation, yoga, drinking lots of questionable energy drinks or any other method—and the whole of the self is focused upon this symbolic representation, so that the whole of the universe, for a time, is nothing but that symbol, sent down to the deep levels of manifestation. Ceremonial magic, once taken out of its medieval context, is an incredibly effective (and fun) method for this, the idea being to completely overload all of the senses—sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch—with content directly symbolizing one's intent until complete shutdown of the conscious apparatus. After completing one's working, *you then forget what you have done*. Your desire tends to enter your reality as soon as it leaves your head.

This process works remarkably well. That's really all you need to know about magic. It's motor oil to decrease the friction of life and give you control over how you spend your precious time on this planet.

Of course, there's more. There's always more.

The more you do this, and the more you exteriorize your desire into the world, the more you are, essentially, exteriorizing your own mind. The most visible example of this is the increasingly implausible synchronicities that begin to pile up the more you combine intent and trance. This is the awakening of a faculty of mind that dwells *beneath and beyond* the observed world.

The data registered by our sensory organs is processed and assembled by the brain into the somewhat-cohesive whole that we perceive; our "realities" are therefore *one hundred percent subjective*. They are wholesale fabrications by the brain, which must sort our observations and memory into a personality functional enough to allow our continued survival. That means that there is no difference between *anything* when viewed from a wide enough angle; it is all a product of the brain. Our "self" is no different from its "environment"; it's all the same thing. All is mind. So if the world starts talking to you, don't freak the fuck out or anything. It's just reminding you that it's also a part of you, and not to treat it as separate.

Mysticism is the mastery of the self by interiorization. Magic is the mastery of the self by exteriorization. Magic won't make you lose your mind, but it will relocate it outside of your body. (How could you lose it when it's right in front of your face?)

There's more, of course. There's always more.

HOW TO TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

It is our will to be enrapt in the divine schematics of the universe, blasted out across the mantle of heaven, burning in ecstasy until the dinner bell rings. Our dreams and our nightmares alike call us home, and it is there that we go. Through our Art do we unify the world of the imaginary and the world of the real until, meeting face-to-face, a third is born in their annihilation.

Our tactics are all encompassing. Mastering the tools of this world—all its tricks of status and aspiration—do we stand above them with our veins coursing with the blood of the Prophets. This is our birthright; our mandate as human beings is nothing less than to swallow the stars. The magician must outsmart the system, that is, the system of creation itself.

I stood on Sunset Boulevard, on the patch of concrete where River Phoenix died, and as I called out to it all, I thought, there will be time enough for all of our dreams.

Our hearts are nothing when weighed against this world.

BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

The training of the magician begins the moment they wholeheartedly embrace such an irrational and romantic calling. It is not a choice made fully consciously, and often has begun months or even years before the technical processes of the occult have been encountered. Those who will in later life declare themselves to be “magicians” (or whatever you want to call it, it has different names in all times and places) will have often been marked from early childhood by strange qualities, high sensitivity, strange obsessions, an overactive imagination and an inability to fully mix with other children; however, looking to the past for a causal explanation of the present is misleading, as the magician’s initiation is conducted by *his or her*

transcendent Self, which has very little to do with the lower-case-*s* self we normally experience in four dimensions. This Self is what is responsible for the awakening and dissolution of the individual, and will use anything available—books, music, movies, your environment, people in your life, ambient information, dreams, life experiences—to lead you directly towards it in an ever-tightening synchronic net.

It is the full identification and unity with this entity—your Self Made God—that is the true goal of magic. Research and discernment are a must; false identification or missing the boat altogether would be unfortunate. When one looks around one begins to realize that this experience is universal to all people in all times and places, and that *almost everybody except you is in the process of doing it or has already done it*. (Can you read the shockwaves?)

I AM—THAT—I AM

We seek the numinous through any and all means possible. We find everything to be true, everything to be permitted. To be so jacked up on magic that reality itself bends around you when you enter the room: That is the goal.

We find the following tactics useful.

INITIATION

The universe gets as giddy as a schoolgirl with ADHD after eating six bowls of Fruit Loops (with Red Bull substituted for milk) when we respectfully make the leap into magic and offer to play with the cosmos on its own terms. Magic lies between us and the universe, right here, right now, this instant, and always has. (Remember to breathe.)

Love saves the universe every time.

STEP THE FIRST, STEP THE LAST

Relax, trust, love, silence.

THE SIXTH SENSE

The sixth sense is nothing more than the human imagination, raised to a fever pitch and trained as a scientific organ. The imagination is the sensory array that we use to contact not only our own hopes, aspirations and manifolds of Self, but also the shared dreamtime of our social units and ultimately of our species. There is no such thing as something that is *just* in your head (or *just* anything)—the imaginary is a shared space which everybody accesses all of the time, as the Internet has shown in a metaphorical physical form. Once this is grasped, the phenomena of telepathy, ESP and precognition, as well as the more occult aspects of advertising and the media, suddenly begin to make sense.

THE OTHER WORLD

Accessed through mirrors, trance, ritual, proper living, art and some drugs. The less said the better, as nothing can be verified and in all likelihood it is a territory that cannot be mapped. Often aligns with the mundane world and manifests spontaneously through coincidence and the “feel” of things.

When you were a kid, in the back seat of the car on a long ride, staring out at the landscape flashing by and everything was made strange—but like home, like the best kind of dream—you saw the door.

The land on the other side of the door is inhabited.

MAPPING THE PSYCHOCOSM

Magical or “spiritual” growth is accomplished by going deeper and deeper inside oneself while simultaneously expanding more and more one’s agency within the world. The inward turn yearns towards death; the overcoming of the illusory self in the silence of the mind. The outward turn yearns toward love; the overcoming of the illusory self in unity with another.

CHEMICAL WARFARE

Drugs are hardly necessary for magic, but can often act like social grease and rocket fuel for its processes. They also have their pitfalls, the finer points of which shouldn’t need to be repeated to an educated audience. These are not merely issues of personal safety and comfort, but also political ones. Not only can drug culture be potentially blamed for some of the failures of the movements of the 1960s, but drugs—mainly meaning marijuana, cocaine and heroin—are at this point such a critical component of the web of narcomilitarism and violence that runs this planet that becoming part of the consumption chain is in many cases supporting the wrong people, whether that means Al Qaeda or the Central Intelligence Agency. Unless you know exactly who grew or made what you’re consuming, to imbibe any illegal (or, in many cases, legal) drug potentially means imbibing human misery, poverty, slavery, torture and murder.

On the other hand, to claim that the use of consciousness-expanding drugs, especially naturally-occurring psychedelics, has not been a primary driving force in human culture since prehistory, or that they cannot lead to peak experiences of tremendous meaning and lasting benefit, would be lying. To say that any substance is inherently “good” would also be pretty far from the truth. A very large part of the population has at least some experience of consciousness-expanding drugs. Those who use them intelligently, or even

who use them for magic, are exceedingly rare. While drugs can be an important catalyst in magic, it should be added, they are certainly not the point or the end state, or even essential to its workings.

Altered states, however, *are* essential, and though drugs may be the easiest way there, they are also the hardest to direct towards productive ends. Peter J. Carroll, one of the originators of chaos magic, made the foundation stone of his approach that “altered states of consciousness are the key to magical power,” and it is indeed altered states of all forms that we seek to cultivate. The human nervous system is the best toy in the world, and we are here to explore and innovate with it. This is true on more than just the individual level.

Cultures are largely defined by the types of altered states that they seek to cultivate *en masse*, and also those that they seek to avoid. In the post-industrialized world, that tends to mean the sexual-territorial thrash of alcohol; the frantic, competitive, mechanical acceleration and paranoia of caffeine, refined sugar, cocaine and amphetamines; the flattened-alpha-wave “vegging out” of passively staring at a flickering screen; socially-constricted and -constructed sexual expression; the vicarious mass aggression of sporting events; and the oil-dependent trance of driving an automobile.

The history of magic and Gnosticism can be seen, on one level, as the history of the exploration of new altered states of consciousness. The counter-conspiracy to cultural hegemony has often been to monkey with its bloodstream.

Jazz, rock ‘n roll, acid house, hip-hop culture, the Sexual Revolution, the Internet, body modification, the mass popularity of marijuana, LSD and MDMA—all spearheaded by those following the Gnostic impulse of reconnection with something beyond the world of illusion—have all opened suggestive doors of new possibility in the previous century, doors that are now either taxed, policed or closed altogether, though they have all

been axles upon which individual consciousnesses, and history, have been revolutionized. The stuff just grows, no matter what they do to clamp down on it.

The forms of altered consciousness that we choose to pioneer and engineer for ourselves and our social groups over the coming decades will determine what doors are opened for us, and how our stories are written. It is through the group-experienced, intent-driven altered state that the magical world is most strongly aligned with the mundane one. Got any ideas?

SORCERY

Remembering by anamnesis, soul-memory, that all is one, one intuits that all may be affected from anywhere, at any time, in any way. It is hardly mystic; you are simply more than you think you are.

Attempting to change your corner of the cosmic game with magic can create *opportunities*, but it's still up to you to take them, even if they're inside you.

DIVINATION

Remembering by anamnesis that all is one, one intuits that any information about the totality may be gained from any fragment anywhere, at any time, in any way (holographic universe principle).

Divination systems tend to be a training system for a psychic faculty that will cease to need props after a certain point. Divine the future in the clouds, the rustling of the wind through the trees, your dreams. Better yet, listen directly to your heart.

BEASTIES

It is a very “cute” and androcentric contrivance of the “postmodern” (i.e., sarcastic) approach to magic that anything that is not immediately visible is of necessity created and sustained by human belief. This is only feasible from the perspective of the, um, “non-dual experience.” Try to stop believing in street-level reality and see where that gets you.

One is at a loss as to what spirits, égregores, demons, angels, gods, Great Old Ones, etheric floaters, lwa, Secret Chiefs and other discarnate intelligences are, but experience has shown them to exist independently of the human mind (not that *anything* can ever be truly proven to exist outside of the human mind). They may appear to be psychological metaphor *up to a point*, but beyond that things start turning all Eerie Indiana. The nature of “praeterhuman intelligences” is perhaps the central riddle of the whole magic game. When venturing into faerie land one is recommended to have one’s wits together at all times. Exercise discretion and don’t step out of the circle. Invoke to balance, not exaggerate.

And remember that if you invite them in, discarnate intelligences can quickly stop being discarnate.

STICKING IT WHERE IT DON’T BELONG

When performing any magic action whatsoever, be prepared ahead of time to get *exactly what you asked for*, and don’t be surprised when things turn out much more literally than you thought they would.

MAGUSITIS

If a black cat crosses your path, it’s bad luck; if a dragonfly does, it’s good luck—to the superstitious mind, certain events have occult meanings. To

the magical mind, *all* events have occult meanings. Under extreme magical consciousness, every street number is immediately broken down and reconstituted through gematria into Qabalistic patterns; every stain in the pavement becomes a rune; every advertisement is trying to reprogram your soul; the fragments of lyrics from the radios of passing cars are talking directly to you; all world events and the intricacies of pop culture are taken to be the signs and portents of Aeonian progression; every movement of the mind is the passing shadow of something huge and luminous. Literalism, quite dangerously, is often not far behind.

Navigating this is an ongoing part of the magical experience. Laughter is key here—learning to laugh at existence and at oneself. The Neuro-Linguistic Programming concept of the *state break* can also be useful—derailing unwanted trains of thought by some sudden, random and absurd action.

WE FLOAT

The primary logical fallacy in magic is the establishment of one-to-one relationships between signifiers and signifieds. Give it a rest. There are never easy answers, as all initiated symbols and texts can be interpreted on several levels and from several angles. Occult symbols and concepts are not “read” with the conscious mind, they are read with the entire entity in all four basic dimensions; they are read with the totality of one’s experience and hence none of it “means” anything in and of itself. The “meaning” dwells in the relationship you establish with that symbol in the moment. This applies exponentially more to magical and paranormal experiences. The other world turns to address the easy caress of metaphor rather than the pornography of fact.⁸

Magic exists in and partakes of the character of inbetweenness. It exists in the blank spaces between the sentences, between the personalities, between the “facts” of the matter. In the third mind. Those who can dwell in the blankness between the words and the numbers will be forever free.

RULE NUMBER ONE OF LIVING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Whether or not you believe in magic or not, and whether or not magic is viable as a scientific discipline, and whether or not magic is “real” or not is your own opinion, but *It doesn't matter one single bit*. Because politics, pop culture and advertising don't work along any rules *except the rules of magic*.

CONSPIRACY THEORY AND ARCANE SYMBOLISM

Multiple-choice question: Which is the most powerful magician?

1. The ritualist standing at her altar (altar) conjuring with her four weapons: wand (wand), cup (cup), dagger (dagger) and pentacle (pentacle).
2. The ritualist standing at her altar (her life) conjuring with her four weapons: wand (willpower), cup (intuition), sword (discrimination) and pentacle (material resources).
3. The ritualist standing at her altar (the masses) conjuring with her four weapons: wand (the media), cup (consensus trance), sword (laws and military) and pentacle (the economy).
4. The ritualist standing at her altar (the world) conjuring with her four weapons: wand (active individuals), cup (passive masses), sword (warfare) and pentacle (planetary resources).
5. The ritualist standing at her altar (spirit) conjuring with her four weapons: wand (fire), cup (water), sword (air) and pentacle (earth).

TIME

Through magic we reorient ourselves in time, investigate ourselves in our many facets, reach around corners. We ponder the past; seek its secret threads and what it can tell us about who we are. We try to live fully for the moment, be conscious only of this eternal present. And sometimes we make plans for the future, write out our little magic spells, aim high, set goals and it all works out *now*, doesn't it? And in the overlaps and blank spots of our binding of time, in the static, is the real magic made.

In this human condition we try to decipher our sadness, ask our mortality and weakness for its name, and our sorrow is nothing save time itself.

Stumbling through inner London in the rain, alone and crazy from the magic, I came upon something safe. In an abandoned playground in the shadow of the council flats I found a worn stone circle, a hollow carved out in the center, overflowing with rainwater. I had been locked up in my room doing the magic and trying to unravel the puzzles of eternity and here in front me was this offering bowl, the writing carved above it reading simply:

“to catch them
and be filled
again
and again
and again”

And this was magic. And when I looked around me at the empty metal bars of the playground and knew that it was not raindrops but children that would be caught and held safe, I understood that this was real magic. Stark feminine force, a reality as hard and unyielding as the concrete, waiting

underneath the wars and the stock market and our rebellion and this playground earth to catch us all. Underneath all the games and the words.

This was surely the work of a Master Builder.

The magic connections we weave underneath the world's seeming. The intelligence that peers in and laughs at our little games.

THE BEDSIDE MANNER

After the primary initiations one is urged to move the focus away from the self; a watched pot never boils after all and Will is never perfected when it is divided in self-examination. There are infinite masks for a magician to wear but ultimately it is what you add to the lives of those close to you that you will be judged by.

The days of the solitary magician, sitting at home manically charting Qabalistic datum or sitting at the computer discussion “shifting the dominant paradigm” with invisible others, are over. While all magical systems are to be considered fodder for research and fuel for activation, the only thing that will matter in this century is *what you do* with magic. If you want to change reality, then do it. The dominant trait of the new breed is severe professionalism. Those magicians with sufficiently interesting personal style will become the rock stars and fashionistas of this era, as nobody has been before. Most effective of all will be well-funded and visible collectives of individuals.

As they said in *Godfather II*—“This is the business we have chosen.”

Affirm the unexplainable with every passing instant. The most frightening moment of all may be the one in which you are taken seriously.

MYTHOLOGICAL, RELIGIOUS AND SCIENTIFIC “TRUTH”

Use whatever is most effective; they are props. The true goal would be to create your own mythology; your own science; your own religion from the stuff of will, imagination and direct, unprejudiced experience of life. Easier said than done.

Never be afraid to ask the big questions.

HIGH MAGIC

Turn any television set to the static of any empty channel. The hissing pattern you will see is a 7.3 centimeter radio signal emitted by the Big Bang, cosmic microwave background radiation made up of photons that have spent the last fifteen billion years cooling from that hot instant. The black and white fuzz of the eternal dual principle, split off from that original unity, that first spark, hissing across the screen in endless interplay, like a game of Go, creating trinities, quadrinities; creating all that is through their dance. It is here, the face of creation, in every living room, right there in-between the newscasters and the stars. Turn up the volume and listen to the hiss. In the symbology of the imminent Aeon of Ma’at, of reintegration of spirit into matter, this is the Swan—symbol of firstness, Kether, of regality and purity; who, when approached, chased you from the pond, hissing forth with the viciousness of creation itself.

This is the image of the beginning, unveiled before our furtive gaze.

Since the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics posits that light is neither wave nor particle until it is observed as either, or that things are neither black or white, one way or another until observed as such, then this shows that by observing our origin we are changing it; that by observing our past we are creating our present. Our gaze, after all, is as concrete of a thing as what it regards.

The Participatory Anthropic Principle, going even further, suggests that the observation of the universe is what is required to make it real. Through staring into that primal chaos are we bringing it order; and so is the Great Work performed, in every instant's gaze. I see that, therefore I am that.

The Final Anthropic Principle, last in this trio of weird sisters, suggests that universes *must* produce intelligence in order for that intelligence to observe the creation of the universe and so make it real. This is an eternal intelligence, an eternal mind, which is the end point of the universe's evolution. Intelligence beyond that of the human. God is not in the machine. We are the machine that will create God.

And this is magic. By observation we create; by investing with meaning do we give form; by physical enactment do we make manifest. And what we observe is the infinite, here for us to create whatever we wish from, the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters. And with every passing instant do we create eternity. Aum. Hee hee!

YOUR POINT IS

Every man and woman is a star. Every man and woman is God, creating the totality of the universe they perceive in every instant, whether they are aware of it or not. We are all already playing God. And we are all already Gods—we just have to remember how to access that part of us which partakes of that boundless, non-local divinity. And in that non-local space will you find the voices of the light, if you know how to listen.

What the "divine" is isn't the point; the language fails by definition, as it exists of a plane higher than words. It could be DNA. It could be the morphogenetic field. It could be the Holy Guardian Angel. It could be Christ, Krishna, Atman. Ultimately it doesn't matter, because it is the voice

of intelligence which guards and guides our progression—an intelligence which knows far, far better than any one of us or any collection of us as a group what is best for us. The voice of love is unmistakable and the entire history of the human quest for truth and meaning can be shaken down to one statement, stamped on the forehead of the entire universe so it has to see it every time it looks in its rusty bathroom mirror, and that is:

LOVE IS THE SECRET OF THE UNIVERSE—END OF
FUCKING STORY

. . . end of story. You have now graduated from Consciousness Expansion Class, forever.

Love is the *qiblab* of evolution and of divinity. When adrift in its slipstream, caught in the love-realms of the angelians, we have our purest understanding of things. We have certainty.

The love of the universe.

The love of the future.

The love of each other.

SETTING GOALS

Create positive change on this planet or shut your mouth.

ENDNOTES

¹ *XXX*, a 2001 action film starring Mr. Vin Diesel, is a parable about Generation Hex and the emergence of the chaos current into the mainstream.

² www.drspock.com

³ What Don Beck and Christopher Cowan's "Spiral Dynamics" model of cultural growth, based on the research of Dr. Clare Graves, refers to as the "purple meme."

⁴ Frazer, Sir James G. *The Golden Bough*.

⁵ The onset of magical thinking comes at around the same time as that of language; meaning that by this point the child has already been largely *separated* from its innate sense of oneness with the universe, language being a Promethean binding and individuating agent. The very fact that the child believes it can have magical affect on the universe presupposes separation from that universe. Initiates aim to run time in reverse and return to the source of incarnation *while still incarnated*; it is likely for this reason that we so often see people who begin in magic seeking to cause change to the universe quickly dropping this model and instead seeking to wholly merge with the universe. They have remembered an earlier, more "innate" state of withinity. Rather than seeking to become God-like, they seek to become God. Without the realization that being God is really a fairly commonplace experience, this attitude will produce such shady shit as Western civilization.

⁶ A classic vocation for the magician then becomes to gently prod others awake; and hopefully through more creative positions than the missionary.

⁷ Many thanks to Jack Parsons.

⁸ The Yaminahua shamans of the Peruvian Amazon speak of "tsai yoshtoyoshto," or "language-twisting-twisting." According to them, blunt and concrete language frightens spirits away and instead must be constructed in an oblique and open-ended manner. Compare this to the running effort in the Twentieth Century to restructure English around uncertainty and open-endedness, such as Crowley's strictures on "I" and "because" or Dr. David Bourland's "E-Prime."

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Jason Louv is the editor of *Generation Hex*, an anthology exploring new directions in occulture, released in 2006. He is currently working on a new edition of *Thee Psychick Bible* with Genesis P-Orridge. Educated at the University of California, Santa Cruz; King's College, London; in disreputable parts of the world sharing disreputable drinks with disreputable people; getting in and out of weird occult fracas; and in shamanic training in the foothills of Mount Everest. Worked as the editor of Disinformation Books for two years. Currently lives and works in Vancouver, British Colombia. www.ultraculture.org

Jason Louv

Interview

Q. Your book is really quite groundbreaking as it's the first to give name to a new youth culture. What is Generation Hex / who are the Generation Hexer's?

A. Too-smart-for-their-own-good subjects of a media-overloaded culture which has continually bombarded its youth with occult messages and subliminals, and who are living at a time where mass access to practical occult material has been easier than at any other time... ever. Likely the result of deep-background cultural engineering both by "radical" counterculture factions and MK-Ultra style intelligence community witch doctors. A bunch of nerds who played too many role-playing and collectible card games and can't separate fantasy from reality. The current steering system of the morphogenetic field, charged with mass-evolving an alternative to fundamentalist apocalypse.



Q. Is this inability to separate fantasy from reality a positive trait. What are the implications practically and spiritually speaking?

A. I think that there is an ever-so-subtle line where fantasy and reality overlap and that's the place where all true magic dwells. So it's good not to get too wrapped up in either fantasy or reality.

If the culture is trending toward a 'fundamentalist apocalypse,' how does this mass visioning manifest itself? Are there tell-tale or indicative signs?

A. There are tell-tale and indicative signs of *anything*, if you look. That's one of the great secrets that the best and most dangerous leaders know, religious and political—there's so much ambient information in the world that you can play connect the dots and draw any picture you like, and make it seem like the "writing on the wall." Magicians who figure that out use it for their own creative delerium, inspiration and evolution. It would be very good for the human race if that type of thinking became a bit more wide-spread, so that instead of listening to one side or the other telling us that the world needs to be purified by fire, everybody can be a bit more aware of their individual divinity and the fundamental human right to write one's own life script.

Q. Do you think development of new cultures runs on a cycle?

A. I used to. Now I think that things basically stay the same, that there are certain energies, if you will, that have always been around and will always be around. The names and specifications may change but deep down it's the same. We're always seeing the same thing, just from slightly different angles through time, space and personal incarnation.

Q. Do these energies ebb and flow over time, there but present at differing levels? Or are they more or less at a constant, but capture the popular imagination to varying degrees at different times (generations)?

A. Dunno. I would say that that both are probably true. I've only been around for twenty-four years, though, and unfortunately don't remember any previous lives as Egyptian royalty, heroin-addled occultists, messianic rock stars, bisexual barbers, repressed librarians or anybody else for that matter. So it's hard to say. A lot of this is just my intuitive grasp on things, what I've picked up from reading history, talking to people who have been around longer than me and doing my best to pay attention to the world rushing by. A tree might be a good visual metaphor—the seed being the fundamental set pattern from which the only-apparently chaotic branches grow and cycle through the four seasons.

Q. What do you see as the underlying commonalities of this new magically-oriented generation?

A. I think there's some basic underlying mythology which tends to be subscribed to and which keeps people able to communicate. One is the pressing feeling of some kind of huge upcoming cataclysm or shift in consciousness, i.e. 2012. That's nothing new either, I think that's a standard religious theme in the West. Another is a kind of overwhelming self-importance or feeling of being charged with some type of inscrutably heavy task, like helping this shift to occur. That can be very healthy, up to a point, as long as you do the work instead of just talking people's ears off and endlessly self-defining and self-aggrandizing. Otherwise, there's a kind of early-21st-century magical language that's evolved, comprised of bits and snatches from Peter Carroll books, comics, Spiral Dynamics, various '90s thinkers, which has already become tedious. Stripped of mythology, the

underlying commonality is that it's a large group of young people practicing magic, all with their own motivations, systems and ultimate goals. Which is a gigantic, completely uncivilized and rather inscrutable sandbox.

Q. Is there really a role for magick in the this post post-modernism world?

A. There is always a role for magic. Always. There's always a role for magic in the life of somebody who wants to take better control of their own life, who wants a toolkit for connecting to Spirit. The skills of the magician—divination, healing, enchanting, cursing, counseling, initiation—will always be in high demand on a one-to-one basis. And we need magicians on the global level—we need people capable of constructing positive meaning for the race. Right now it's bad uncles like Rupert Murdoch directing the shadowplay of reality for greed's sake. We could do a lot better than that.

Q. I couldn't agree more. The world could certainly stand a few more magicians, shamans and mystical visionaries walking amongst us. I like your emphasis on the importance of one-to-one interaction. Crowley may have positioned writing a book as a magical act, as exemplified in *Magick In Theory and Practice*, but to me it's within the contact of two people that the true potentation of magic has the potential to be realized.

A. I think you're right, that's a big piece of the puzzle. If you're going to study and practice this mad science shit, then at least figure out how to use it to benefit people besides yourself, since you don't even exist, let's face it. I would also say that magic is a method of communication between individuals and transpersonal realms. It's mostly an individual quest, but having done a lot of group magic, I think the context completely changes when magic becomes a shared thing. The down side is it can be harder to maintain focus for long, extended rites when you have a lot of people

involved, and you have to deal with group dynamics, but the upside is that when magic is the unspoken reason for everybody to be in the same room together, and everybody has to implicitly agree that “it” is real and then everybody is doing magic as a unit, it becomes that much more tangible and real. I do think that solitary magicians miss out on a big part of the story when they refuse to work in groups, or if they only work with people through the internet (which, unfortunately, is often the only available method of collaboration).

Q. Lets talk a little bit about your concept of Ultraculture... how do you define it and do you have any specific plans for actualizing it either online or off?

A. It's a word that means any gathering of two or more magicians. Ultraculture is currently conducting monthly rituals for mass global change. Anybody who wishes is welcome to participate in their own way. There's information about it at www.ultraculture.org.

Q. And what is the nature of the global change your attempting to manifest?

A. That you will have to wait for and see! We'll have a new intent every month. Compassion for all is our primary goal, however.

Dismal Percentage

Mitchell Stone

An ancient visceral priestess
crooked as the seam
leading to patent leather hooves
unraveling tomorrow
as a rope bell dangled in the breeze
stopping for a moment
to test a crow's beak.
The hardwood floor made music
under the weight of her heels
and the door slammed shut
with only the wind to guide it.

Candy's Last Words

Mitchell Stone

Silence creates hat songs of unguided manipulation
and a blue rose dressed in white
marches down an endless trail of bread crumbs
while a cane walks simple steps
along its own knotted rope of personal conviction.

Dragonflies dream body language and swarm from a foxhole below;
Tiny invigorating bullets of Reptilian wisdom
barely missing an abstract fiction farmer standing in a cold field.
his gaze is drawn to ripe and rare animals grazing
in the land of the free, home of the dead.

The next generation comes out of hibernation,
selectively fixing fashion,
dusting the devil's boots.

Passive earth spring green with pink mountain trust,
Unaware of ink dripping from the corner of the eye
toppling candy-striped pyramids
and all that remained.

Cobra in Full Bloom

Mitchell Stone

Wet wind delivered the crowd coated in many colors.
A scent was there – Mildew mixed with rose;
intoxicating the senses under an overflowing moon.
Sinister irrational salesman arose in the flood tide,
their featherless branches scratching pupils raw of imagination.
Starched fingers scraping pavement
littered with homeless pages,
some bundled together safely.
Love etched out its stinging insult at solitude.
Pomegranates promenade through a revolving door
unaware of the bacteria ridden blind alley;
antiseptic beauty hid the murky decay.
Steaming sewers stagnate with tiger lilies.
Triangular slime overlaps a quiet puddle,
dank and muddy,
clouded by vintage urine.
Engorged indigo clouds
working overtime and reduced to sweat.
A silk city night does little to ease the equilibrium
of a day's wet and shiny shadow
once hidden in the gutter.
The crowd pivots on a busted saw and the blade points north,

down where the devil burns.
A cacophony of brash metallic voices reaches around the corner.
Learning lies and machine-gun etiquette from a red-toothed volcano
followed by a flaming lantern lit eternal;
sublime fire at the core,
blazing needles where laser beams form.
Loose change bouncing into a new position with each passing step.
Arrows are bent and broken with stolen glances.
A dog's paw kills confidence in the comfort zone.
A colossal rubber waterbug hisses along oblivious
to gold madonnas clawing at storefront displays
that long to stand still,
buried to the waist in barnyard waste –
a movie played on its windshield creating diversion.
Chain-smoking, static-charged feet gripped the ground in defiance
ready to meet the midway.

Mitchell Stone's work is influenced primarily by Breton's original surrealist movement, utilizing automatic writing and similar techniques to break conventional symbolism and pretention. He is also working on a reference guide to underground cult film and music. His work has appeared in *The Courier Journal*, *Free Radical*, *The Sentinel*, *Blackmail Press*, *Saucyvox*, *Seine Und Werden* and *Muscadine Line: A Southern Journal*. He has worked in media and broadcasting for 20 years. He currently resides in Kentucky.

Acting Up, Standing Down

Salvatore Sapienza

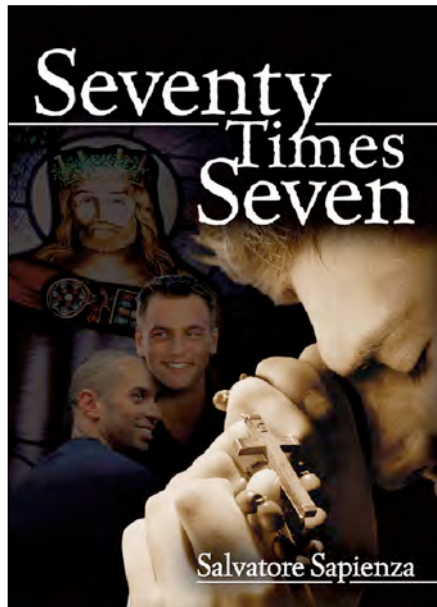
If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. Better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

The Gospel of Saint Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 29-30

It was my week to cook dinner for the community. Although I was confident as a cook, I dreaded this chore because it was simply one more thing to add to my plate. No pun intended. Some communities in our order hired cooks and housekeepers. But, once again, because our community was housed with mostly younger guys still in temporary vows, Mike expected us to live our vow of poverty to the max.

“Dinner will be ready in five minutes, guys,” I announced from the kitchen.

“Can I be of any help, Vito?” Mike asked from the living room couch.



“Yeah, thanks,” I said. “Would you mind setting the table?”

“No, problem,” said Mike, as he walked into the kitchen and reached for the placemats on top of the refrigerator.

Steve came in from the living room clicking the ice in the glass of his Manhattan; an odd drink choice, I thought, for a guy my age, yet somehow it seemed to fit Steve, who was old before his time. Some Brothers in our order had a cocktail or two each night before dinner. This was not frowned upon and was looked at as a way of relieving tension after a hard day’s work. I had my own stress relievers, like listening to music, doing crunches, or jerking off to the stash of stroke books hidden under my mattress. I never saw masturbation as being contradictory to my vows, nor were we ever taught in Novitiate that it was. In fact, one older Brother in our order, who was having prostate trouble, was told by his doctor that he needed to masturbate more often. The older Brother was scandalized by such a suggestion, but asked Brother Victor, our order’s provincial, for permission to jerk off. Doctor’s orders. I would have loved to have been there for that conversation!

Since masturbation did not involve intimate sexual contact with another human being, I did not see it as a breaking of my vow of chastity. This theory (whether it was right or wrong in the eyes of the Church) also led me to justify my recent actions in the video store and sauna. When I started to feel guilty about these incidents, I talked myself into thinking, “Well, yes, those men were in the same room as I, but we never touched. There was no intimacy involved. Those guys in the video booths were simply visuals for me.” Right or wrong, at least it made me feel better for the time being.

Chastity, as I had been taught in Novitiate, was withholding oneself from any intimate romantic or sexual relationships. What Brother Patrick from Mike’s old Novitiate class was doing was absolutely a violation of his

vows. He had a long-term partner on the outside world. Maybe my discretions were inappropriate, but I would never do what Patrick was doing. At least that's what I told myself.

"Did you see the cover of *The Village Voice*?" asked Steve, as he held up the newspaper for all of us to see at the dining room table that night. The cover of the newspaper featured an angry group of AIDS activists wearing 'Silence Equals Death' and 'Queer Nation' t-shirts and brandishing their fists in the air. I instantly recognized the youngest and most handsome member of the group, the one Steve was pointing at with his index finger. "That's Jim Bowman," he continued. "A Mount Saint Vincent alumnae. Didn't he graduate your year, Vito?"

"Yeah, he did," I said. "He won the Millet award at graduation. What's he doing on the cover?"

"It's an article about the founding of ACT-UP," Steve said, as he passed the paper around the table.

I had already known that my former high school classmate, Jim Bowman, had become one of the founding members of ACT-UP. I had run into him in the year prior at a meeting being held at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center on Thirteenth Street in Manhattan for AIDS service workers throughout the city. There were representatives there from GMHC, ACT-UP, and even LIAAC, the resource center for people with AIDS on Long Island.

Larry, the executive director of ACQC, had asked me to attend the meeting that night with him. My position for the AIDS center in Queens was simply as a volunteer buddy, so there really was no reason for Larry to ask me to attend the meeting with him that night, other than giving Larry the opportunity to spend some time with me. Larry had been a big flirt with me, since I started volunteering at the center. He even gave me a bag of expensive designer clothes – most with the tags still on them - that had

belonged to his lover who had recently died from an AIDS related illness. Although I knew it probably wasn't a good idea to lead him on, I went to the meeting with Larry anyway, as a way of saying thanks for the clothes. Plus, I had to admit, I liked the attention he gave me.

The meeting room in the Community Center was jam packed with people. It appeared to be standing room only, but Larry spotted one seat in the front row.

"C'mon," he said, as he led the way to the empty chair. I thought he was going to let me sit there, but, instead, he took the seat for himself and left me standing there. He then patted his lap with both hands and motioned me to have a seat there. So, I did. Probably not the most appropriate thing, I know, but, as I said, I enjoyed the attention. Besides, it felt good to be held. I couldn't remember the last time someone had held me in his arms.

I scanned the faces of the many people who filled the room from wall to wall. There were lots of long sideburns and combat boots – and that was just the women. Many of the young men present were wearing "Freedom Rings" or whistles around their necks, the latter to be used in case of gay bashing. As I looked around the room for familiar faces, I locked eyes with Jim Bowman. I had not seen him since we graduated high school, but he somehow recognized me and gave me a thumbs-up.

The meeting focused mainly on funding for AIDS organizations and was fairly bland by ACT-UP standards. The latter part of the meeting, however, was an open forum in which tempers flared over a proposed demonstration at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Cardinal O'Connor had been criticized for his refusal to educate AIDS patients at Cardinal Cooke Hospital – which was run by the Catholic Church – about safer sex practices. Many activists present felt that their only way to get media attention focused on the harmful effects of abstinence-only education was to

demonstrate outside the cathedral. This point was not contested, until someone suggested demonstrating inside the cathedral during Sunday mass service. Even some of the die-hard activists I knew from reading "Outweek" magazine were against this suggestion, but a few of the younger ACT-Upers in their "Silence Equals Death" and "Queer Nation" tee-shirts were adamant about infiltrating the congregation one Sunday in the near future.

Then, unexpectedly, Jim Bowman stood up from among the throng of people standing at the back of the room. "There's something I think I should make known to you all this evening," he shouted from the back of the room. Sitting on Larry's lap, I turned my head around to look at Jim as he addressed the crowd. He looked right at me, as he continued his statement. "I think we should be careful about what we say," he warned. "There are members of the Catholic Church present at tonight's meeting. I'm talking about religious clergy members."

"Then they should make themselves known to us!" one woman with a crew cut shouted.

"Would you like to make yourself know to us?" Jim threatened the crowd. I lowered my head to avoid his gaze. Larry looked at me with an expression that suggested I say something.

After a few moments of silence, the woman with the crew cut yelled, "Cowards!!"

With that, the meeting ended. The topic, it was decided, would be brought up in private at a meeting for founding members of the organization only.

As the crowd filed out of the community center, Larry asked if I wanted to go for a drink at Stonewall on Christopher Street. He could tell I was a bit shaken up. Before I could give him an answer, Jim Bowman approached me and put out his hand. Startled, I shook his hand staring at his wrist, which was adorned with a black leather cock-ring with silver snaps.

“I was going to apologize for making you feel uncomfortable in there,” he said. “But desperate times call for desperate measures. The Church is killing us, you know.”

“No, Jim, AIDS is killing us,” I replied bitterly.

“How can you remain a part of an organization that hates gay people so much?” he asked vehemently. “Are you that much of a self-hating faggot?”

Larry pulled at my arm and said, “Let’s go home, okay?”

As Larry and I walked away, Jim shouted down Thirteenth Street after us, “Going home to get fucked by your lap buddy, Brother Vito?! Make sure he puts on a rubber before he fucks you, you goddamn hypocrite!”

I wanted to turn around and tell him how much I’d been working in the fight against AIDS. I wanted him to know about my buddy work and about educating my students about the disease, but something held me back. Deep down, maybe I thought a part of what he said was true. Maybe I was self-hating.

The demonstration at St. Patrick’s Cathedral took place a few months later, and it made front page news. Jim Bowman didn’t make any of the covers, but now, almost a year later, here he was raising his fist on the cover of *The Village Voice*.

“It’s such a shame Jim got involved in such a militant group,” Mike said, as he passed the “Voice” around the dinner table. “From what I remember, he was such a good kid in high school. Like you said, Vito, he won the Millet award at graduation.”

The award had been named for James Millet, a former Mount student who had been killed in Vietnam. Each year, the award was given to the graduate who best demonstrated community service.

“I don’t see how Jim’s involvement in ACT-UP goes against your memories of him as a good kid,” I said somewhat defensively. “The Millet award is given each year to the Mount student who most demonstrates good

citizenship and service to the community. That's exactly what Jim is still doing today with ACT-UP."

"Look, I understand the anger gay people must feel about government's response to AIDS," said Mike, "but isn't there a better way of getting their message across? Do they have to be so in-your-face?"

"If you read the article," said Steve, "they talk about plans to stand outside Catholic schools – on public property, so they can't be arrested – and distribute condoms to students on their way home from school. They say it's in response to the lack of AIDS education in Catholic schools."

"We teach abstinence in all our health classes, don't we?" asked Mike.

"Yeah," I said, "but those classes are taught by sixty-year-old Brothers. The kids don't feel comfortable talking about sex with them."

"What's there to discuss?" said Steve. "Don't have sex. It's that simple. Besides, their parents should be teaching them that at home."

"But they don't," I continued. "We're in the middle of a crisis here. I don't want to see any of my students die in the next few years, okay? I give them all the facts."

"You don't talk about condoms in the classroom, do you?" asked Mike.

"I always stress abstinence," I said, "and we talk all about morals and reasons for not becoming sexually active at such a young age. I'm aware that I teach a religion class. However, during the question and answer period, the issue of condoms is always brought up by the kids. I tell them straight-forward that the safest way to protect themselves is not to have sex, however, any one who chooses to be sexually active, should know the facts about how this disease is transmitted and how to go about protecting themselves."

"I think that's a good thing," said Bryan timidly. "We're an order of educators. It's our responsibility to give our students the tools they need to live a healthy and happy life. We can't simply bury our heads in the sand

and wait for this thing to go away. Knowledge is power.” Although I appreciated Bryan’s support, I wished he hadn’t sounded so much like a bumper sticker.

“Do you think Jim will have the group target the Mount?” asked Steve.

“Who knows?” said Mike. “We better have a game plan just in case. I’ll ask Victor about it on Sunday.”

“Are you going to the provincial office on Sunday?” I asked.

“No,” said Mike, “Victor’s coming here. I thought I told you about it. He’s going to be talking with you guys about preparing for your final vows.”

“I’m going to freshen up my drink,” said Steve. “Can I get anybody a cocktail?”

“I’ll have a seven-and-seven,” I said to the surprise of everyone around the table.

“Seriously, Vito?” Steve asked. “You never have a drink with dinner.”

“Well, I’m celebrating the last day of my rowdy religion class,” I said.

When Steve returned with the drinks, he offered a toast.

“Here’s to finals!” he exclaimed. “Final day of classes, final exams next week, and preparations for final vows.”

So I raised my glass to finals, unaware of what was about to begin.

Reprinted from *Seventy Times Seven* (Haworth Press, Southern Tier Editions, 2006) with permission of the author.

Salvatore Sapienza is a former Marist Brother in the Catholic Church. During his years in religious formation, he taught English at an all-boys high school and ministered to people with AIDS, working alongside Father Mychal Judge, the New York City fire chaplain who died in the World Trade Center attacks. Sapienza's essay on his experiences with Father Judge will be included in the book, *Remembering Father Mychal*, edited by Brendan Fay. Sapienza has appeared as an actor in several films, including *Runaway Jury*, *Mr. 3000*, and *A Love Song for Bobby Long*. *Seventy Times Seven* is his first novel. He and his partner own the Beechwood Manor Inn bed and breakfast in Saugatuck, Michigan.

Salvatore Sapienza

Interview

Q. To be honest, when I first picked up *Seventy Times Seven*, I thought it would be about some closeted priest struggling with his sexuality, but it's not about that at all.

A. I was so not interested in telling that story. Let's face it, it's been done. What I was interested in was exploring a young gay man's desire for incorporating spirituality into his life. For

the main character, Vito, being gay is not the struggle. Trying to incorporate his sexual nature with his spiritual nature is the problem. The gay men he encounters denounce religion, just as the strongly as the church denounces them.



Photo: WyattLanc.com

Q. At the beginning of the novel, Vito's life seems so extreme. He's at a sex club one minute and in church the next. He goes from dancing shirtless at the Roxy one night, to teaching Catholic school students the next morning. I really like how the pop culture references in the book relate to Vito's struggle.

A. The book is set in 1992, and many of the popular artists at the time—Prince, Madonna, Depeche Mode, Sinéad O'Connor—were juxtaposing sexuality and spirituality in their music. So, it's the perfect background for what Vito's going through in the novel. Those artists were pushing the nation's buttons, saying that yes, we are sexual beings, but we can also be spiritual beings. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Q. And, I should point out, although the topic sounds heavy, the novel itself is not.

A. Well, thank you. Hey, with Wilson Phillips' "Hold On" playing a pivotal role in the novel, how heavy can it be, right? (laughs)

Q. Speaking of which, I really like the iTunes iMix on your website. That's something unique for a book.

A. Music plays such an important role in Vito's life and is integral to the novel. Unfortunately, for royalty reasons, I was only allowed to use two lines per song. The iMix was a way to give readers the tunes in their entirety. All of the songs included are from the time period the novel is set, when many artists were combining sexuality and spirituality in their lyrics. I added two recent tunes, Robbie Williams' "Feel" and Ari Gold's "Bashert," because I listened to them at length while I was writing the novel. They were my muses. My two hot muses! (laughs).

Q. You came out at seventeen and lived the gay New York City lifestyle. What then made you decide to enter religious life and take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience?

A. Like Vito, I was not some closet case entering the church so I could hide, although there were plenty of guys who did. I knew that God had made me gay, and I was open about it to my superiors before I entered the church. My decision to enter was based on two things: my dissatisfaction with the hedonistic gay life I was exposed to in Manhattan, and my desire to address the spiritual needs of the burgeoning AIDS crisis. I thought there had to be more to life than going clubbing, hitting the gym, and wearing the right clothes. And, let's face it, it wasn't a bad time for a young gay man to be celibate. I naively believed that I and the other forward-thinking men who joined with me could make a difference in bringing the church into the twenty-first century. Not surprisingly, most of us left after just a few years.



Photo: WyattLane.com

Q. What ultimately made you decide to leave the church?

A. For the most part, I was faithful to my vows, but I was leading two lives, and I desperately prayed to be made whole. For some reason, I could not fully embrace either world. Everyone gay I knew rejected any notion of spirituality, and anything sexual - especially homosexual - was condemned by the church. The two lives were pulling at me from either end, and it was an unhealthy place for me to be. For the sake of my mental well-being, I had to choose. And, I chose to leave the church.

Q. What is your religious affiliation these days?

A. I do have a great love for the Catholic Church, believe it or not. I still have friends who are priests, Brothers, and nuns, and they're healthy individuals doing great work. However, the current Pope's desire to rid the clergy of gay priests is so mean-spirited and quite the opposite of what Jesus instructed, that I can not in good conscience remain a Catholic. I suppose I'm a Christian, though, to the extent that I believe Jesus led an exemplary life worth imitating.

Q. There are many gay men for whom the idea of being gay and Christian seems oxymoronic.

A. I can totally understand that. Most gay men who were raised Christian have so much hatred for organized religion, and rightfully so. Unfortunately, that's turned many gay men off from any type of spiritual life, and I think that's a shame. On the other hand, many of my gay friends in recent years have studied Buddhism or practice Kabbalah, so I think there's definitely a growing desire among us to connect with the spirit.

Q. How much of *Seventy Times Seven* is autobiographical?

A. About half, but which half, I'm not going to tell you (laughs). I don't mean to be evasive. Much of what happens to Vito is based on what happened to me, but it would be inaccurate to call the book autobiographical. I liked the freedom of writing a novel, as I was able to create a cohesive and symbolic narrative, and one that, hopefully, readers will find engaging and thought-provoking.

2 Poems

Jennifer Silvia

1)

Displaced from their time
Two amphetamine angels
Want for Halloween

2)

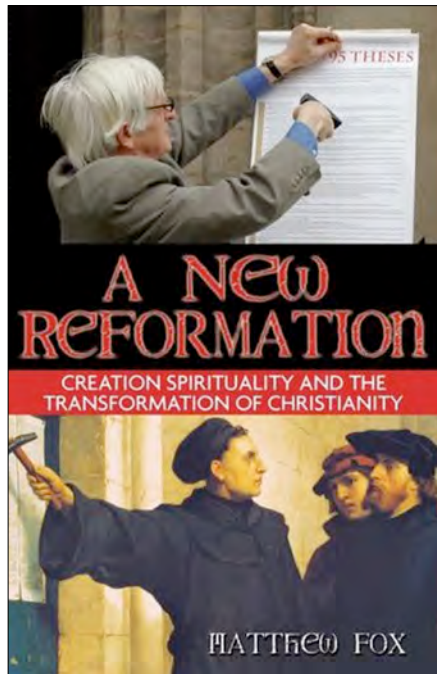
four forever years
turns into lunch once a week
for one whole hour

A New Reformation: What Can We Do?

Matthew Fox

As we have seen, fundamentalism has taken over much of the Roman Catholic Church and many of the Protestant churches. What theologian Dorothy Soelle has correctly called Christofascism is alive and well in Western religion and in some very lofty places in American politics and government.

An alternative is possible. For this to happen, a divorce is necessary. Maybe it is time to let the fundamentalists have the church, with its buildings and museums, its debts and payouts for pedophile offenders. We who believe otherwise and are not fundamentalists will take Christ. And with this simple divorce, a new season may begin: a genuine Pentecost, a rebirth of the church for a third millennium—a church made up of



people practicing spirituality, not people structuring a religion. The ninety-five theses that follow shed light on this New Pentecost experience.

This New Pentecost will not be fundamentalist and will not be based on worship of a punitive God. It will not tolerate sexism in itself or those adhering to it. It will seek wisdom along with knowledge, a true balance that avoids 1) anti-intellectualism and anti-scientism (as evidenced in the fight against evolution and homosexuality) and 2) rationalism and living and praying in the head. It will honor all the chakras, including the second or sexual chakra, for the sacred energy that can be found in them (see the Song of Songs on this subject). It will teach meditation forms of many varieties and will empower people to be mystical activists—spiritual warriors, mystics, and prophets.

The new “church” of this New Reformation will have as little structure as possible. As occurred during the years of the early Christian church, its faithful will meet in home churches in which the focus will be praying and sharing stories—their own and those of others, including that of Jesus. At times they will gather in larger groups—perhaps once a month—to share the true celebration of the larger community, which, with its use of dance and images rather than an overabundance of readings and sermons, will take a form both post-modern and pre-modern.

Who will lead and be ordained in the church of this New Reformation? The leaders will be those who have trained in the wisdom and creation spirituality tradition (that of the historical Jesus) and who feel called to be part of the leadership of this new church. In keeping with its theology of the *priesthood of all workers*, those who serve will have jobs that are not ecclesial as such. In this new church, rather than being a profession in itself or a privileged hierarchical class, the priesthood will be an avocation, an honoring of the midwifery powers of

all workers, for every individual who is doing good work—that is, work that is a blessing to the community—is already a priest, a midwife of grace.

The New Reformation will not be naively unaware of the powers and principalities of this world. Instead, it may take these on directly at times, for it knows that the powers that gather around a punitive Father ideology—fundamentalism and fascism—are always with us.

This new church, while looking to many spiritual traditions of the past, will trust the Spirit to lead us in new ways for the third millennium. It will understand that we must travel light, divesting ourselves of two thousand years of ecclesial and cultural baggage, for the world today is a new place.

95 THESES OR ARTICLES OF FAITH FOR A CHRISTIANITY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM (SELECTED)

Like Martin Luther before me, I present here ninety-five theses—or faith observations. These have been drawn from my sixty-four years of living and practicing religion and spirituality. I trust I am not alone in recognizing these truths. For me they represent a return to our origins, to the spirit and teachings of Jesus and his prophetic ancestors, and to the Christ unleashed by Jesus' presence and teachings.

These theses are an invitation to discussion and debate. Can what we know as Christianity transform itself for a new millennium and the generations to come? Can it take from its past only what is wise and move into a new age with a renewed commitment to sustainability for the earth and justice for the earth's people? These theses offer the possibility of discussion about not just a New Reformation, but a transformation of what we have known up to now.

4

God the Punitive Father is not a God worth honoring, but a false god and an idol that serves empire builders. The notion of a punitive, all-male God is contrary to the full nature of the Godhead, who is as much female and motherly as masculine and fatherly.

7

Everyone is born a mystic and a lover who experiences the unity of things and all are called to keep alive this mystic or lover of life.

11

Religion is not necessary but spirituality is.

13

Spirituality and religion are not the same any more than education and learning, law and justice, or commerce and stewardship are the same.

18

Eco-justice is a necessity for planetary survival and human ethics; without it we are crucifying the Christ all over again in the form of destruction of forests, waters, species, air, and soil.

22

Celebration and worship are key to human community and survival, and such reminders of joy deserve new forms that speak in the language of the twenty-first century.

37

To honor the ancestors and celebrate the communion of saints does not mean putting heroes on pedestals, but rather honoring them by living out lives of imagination, courage, and compassion in our own time, culture, and historical moment, as they did in theirs.

Reprinted from *A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality and the Transformation of Christianity* (Inner Traditions, 2006) with permission of the publisher.

Matthew Fox was a member of the Dominican Order in good standing for 34 years until he was expelled by Pope Joseph Ratzinger, who was a cardinal and chief inquisitor at the time. Matthew Fox is the founder of Wisdom University (formerly the University of Creation Spirituality) and the foremost proponent of Creation Spirituality, based on the mystical teachings of early Christian visionaries such as Hildegard von Bingen, Meister Eckhart, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. He is the author of 26 books, including *Original Blessing* and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*.

A Conversation With Matthew Fox

Interview by Joseph Gelfer

WITTENBERG, Germany—500 years ago Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Castle Church, protesting against the indulgences and corruption of Pope Leo X. On a cloudy day last May, Matthew Fox repeated this act with his own 95 Theses.

Q. Your latest book, “A New Reformation” highlights many of your concerns with Catholicism as it is communicated through the Vatican. Clearly, you’ve had a troubled personal relationship with Rome over the years. It would be tempting to disengage with the Papacy and the Church altogether: do you perceive your 95 Theses as being a symbolic gesture or something very real to help envision a Future Church free of the many unsavory themes promoted by Ratzinger, et al?

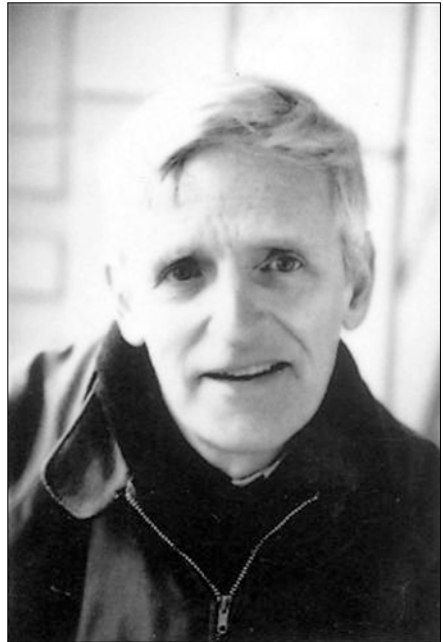


Photo: Inner Traditions

A. When I nailed my theses at Wittenburg, the first question from the press and onlookers was this: “Is this just about Rome or also about the Protestant church?” I liked this question a lot because my beefs are not just with the Vatican, as egregiously corrupt as it obviously is at this time in history. It is also with the Protestant ennui. A Lutheran pastor in Germany told me the day before that about 6% of Lutherans were practicing in his part of Germany. Add to that the nutty fundamentalist weirdness in the American Protestant religious/political scene and you realize that the Vatican does not have a monopoly on distortion of the message and spirit of Jesus at this time. A Reformation/Transformation is needed across the board. Of course the nailing was a symbolic gesture but it was meant to awaken energy and to tap into the moral outrage so many Catholics and others are feeling at the direction organized religion is taking these days. Political movements are fueled by moral outrage and in many ways my action was an effort to kick the cadaver that Christianity has become and see if there is any life there at all to renew itself. If not, if religion is no longer interested in spirituality, then we have our answer and we must move ahead without religion. As the Dalai Lama says, we don’t need religion but we do need compassion.

Q. Have you had any responses, either official or off-the-record, from the Vatican to your call for a New Reformation? I know the Monsignors are typically tight-lipped in public but also delight in gossip. Maybe you think an official response is unimportant, looking instead to the laity who, after all, constitute the body of the Church?

A. No, I have not had any official response. But I think the opposition already mounted by extreme right wing groups like Opus Dei who are extremely influential in the media are their unofficial response. When Ratzinger was elected pope I got a call from Chris Matthew’s program,

“Hardball” at MSNBC. They said they really wanted me on their program, I would have “at least 30 minutes,” etc. etc. Many, many promises. I said okay, went to a local studio where it was satellited in, they hooked me up, it was 4:25 and Matthews was throwing softies to some Catholic talking about altar boys or something. They tell me: “30 seconds more” and a lady comes on and says: “I’m sorry, Father, but we don’t have time to cover your full story.” I said, you have over 30 minutes in the program. “We are not interviewing you,” she said. I said: “This is a political act. Opus Dei got to you, didn’t they?” There was silence. The man who had hooked me up at the TV station said: “In 8 years of working in TV I have NEVER seen anything like this.” I said: “You have never been up against the Opus Dei.” Someone commented: Chris Matthews should change the program title from “Hardball” to ‘No balls.’” Curiously, Matthews later had an Opus Dei officiano on, some lady with eight kids riding her bicycle and going to church a lot. No mention of how the founder, rushed into canonization by Ratzinger and the last pope, admired Hitler (!) and Franco, etc. etc. I also think this new pope’s first public response to the priestly abuse situation is most telling and is a response to me or anyone else who suggests the Vatican is currently unsavory. It is “in your face” for sure. It concerns Fr. Maceo, a Mexcian priest who started a totally right wing group (cf. Opus Dei in Spain), raised tons of money, but also was accused in letters written by the nine victims to the Vatican beginning twenty years ago, of sexually abusing them when they were twelve year old seminarians. Ratzinger’s office did nothing about these accusations until December, 2004, Ratzinger saying, “it would be imprudent to attack a priest who has done so much for the church.” In December, just prior to his election, Ratzinger’s office finally opened an investigation. But in May, they shut it down. For good.

Q. I wonder what kind of percentage of Catholics, both within the congregation and the clergy, locates itself in ideological opposition to the

Vatican? From my experience growing up, studying and working amongst Catholics, most feel an uncomfortable tension between their relationship between Christ and the Vatican, but that could just be indicative of the people I know.

A. Many, many Catholics have been voting with their feet. Many have become Unitarian or joined the Unity church or like myself become Episcopalian. The priestly pedophile issue has now cost the US Catholic church way over one billion dollars and the cost is rising. That is a lot of money to take from little old ladies in the pews. Remember though that the current pope, by silencing and then expelling theologians, has reduced theology to ideology and in doing so wants only ideologically correct bishops and cardinals. Thus the hierarchy are intellectual and moral midgets--only this explains how the pedophile disaster could have been so badly mishandled by them all.

Q. What are your thoughts on the sex scandals with paedophilic priests in the US? I often wonder if we project our societal fears onto the clergy as a way of avoiding asking ourselves, "Why are we so confused about how to sexually relate to children?" This leads directly into the heart of Christianity and sexuality. How do we go about reconciling what has historically been set up as such a duality?

A. Yes, it is a kind of chicken come home to roost sort of situation. Why? Because the current church's teaching on sexuality has been totally politicized ever since Pope Paul VI's disastrous encyclical called "Humanae Vitae" which forbade birth control just when the pill was becoming available in a big way in culture and just when the women's movement and later the gay/lesbian liberation movements were catching steam. Where does this forbidding of birth control come from? Jesus never forbade it;

Judaism is not against it. It comes from St. Augustine, the fourth century theologian who lived a pretty loose sexual existence as a young man but on becoming a Christian took vows of celibacy, etc. He taught that every sexual act had to make it possible for children to be conceived. That is the pope's teaching. It comes from Augustine, not from Scriptures. In a time of AIDS, of population explosion, of gay and lesbian awareness, it is simply unconscionable.

Q. Continuing society's obsession with the clergy's sexuality, what about gay priests? Mark Jordan suggests there's something uniquely queer about the clergy: not only are there probably a larger percentage of gays within the clergy than in society at large, many of their characteristics and tastes are explicitly camp. As a predominantly straight man I find it quite amusing to discover that most of the things I appreciate most about Catholicism: ritual, over-the-top aesthetics, wearing dresses (I was an altar boy) are right in this zone.

A. Native American teachers have taught me that traditionally the spiritual directors to their big chiefs were homosexual. Why? "Because it was understood that homosexuals bring a special spiritual gift to the greater community." Thus a homophobic culture is committing spiritual kamakaze. Homosexuals have experienced solitude and estrangement at an early age; they have had to wrestle with creating their own identity at an early age; creativity flourishes often as a result. And they are sensitized to issues of injustice and discrimination. All this happens if they are healthy. If unhealthy, one finds an inordinate percentage of addictions--drugs, alcohol, sex, and other addictions--in the homosexual community. Much of it to numb the pain. Do not just judge homosexuality by the camp or the sideshows. Including the ecclesial sideshows. Many homosexuals are far more in touch with their mystical side than are heterosexuals. That is one

reason they have a gift to give the larger community and are often drawn to the ministry and contemplative lives in monasteries.

Q. You talk in your new book about a, “truly sacred masculine”; as someone who grew up in a feminist household and a father of a son, I’m particularly interested in the role masculinity has to play in the spiritual dynamic. It’s quite ironic that Christianity is such a patriarchal institution, yet if you unpack masculinity from patriarchy you find there is almost as little said about authentic man as woman, if we can speak in such essentialist terms. What is left of “man” when the Patriarch is removed?

A. Males are meant to mirror a “Father Sky” Divinity while also honoring the “Mother Earth” side in them. Sky is expansive, it is large, it is ancient, it is passionate and alive--these are lessons that today’s science is rediscovering about “Father Sky.” The healthy masculine dances with the healthy feminine and does not endorse “power-over” relationships but lives relationships of “power-with.” The healthy masculine strives for justice for one’s own people and for all people and does not confuse “winning” with living. The healthy masculine entertains the contemplative in oneself and learns to embrace solitude and silence. The healthy masculine honors and develops creativity within self and others. The healthy masculine laughs at self and being in general and honors and practices the awe and wonder and childlikeness in oneself. The healthy masculine finds healthy outlets for one’s grief and anger that do not injure others. Compassion is his ethic.

Q. I notice you speak of “spiritual warriors”, which reminded me in part of the archetypes beloved by the mythopoetic movement. Do you have any thoughts on the myriad books and workshops born out of this? I have a theory that the mythopoets have been misidentified as the “spiritual” men’s movement, when in fact it is simply a call to mono-dimensional,

retrospective behavior patterns: far short of the kind of Jungian Spirituality it alludes to.

A. I confess I derive my interest in the “spiritual warrior” far more from the writings of the mysticism of Hafiz and the other mystical teachers such as Aquinas and Eckhart and others than I do from the mythopoetic writers. I look for examples rather than just words and we have been given many in our times: King, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, to name a few. The spiritual warrior has done his/her inner work as well as outer work. Such a person is a lover (i.e. a mystic) as well as a prophet or warrior. The former is what happens when one does one’s inner work.

Q. You include Andrew Harvey’s “Direct Path” in the recommended reading of your latest book. I’ve always found Harvey an interesting man, especially his spiritual evolution away from gurus, such as Mother Meera, to a non-mediated relationship with God. Have you had any experiences of gurus yourself, as opposed to those who are simply good teachers? This lends itself to thinking about the need for Church at all: if the Cosmic Christ is coming - not as an individual incarnation but as a heart-based energy uplift - is any hierarchical structure needed or important?

A. I eschew guru. Always have. I don’t think the guru thing translates healthily into western consciousness. Too many examples of the kind of thing Andrew Harvey suffered. One should never surrender one’s intelligence or one’s conscience. That is not to say that some of these Eastern teachers are not wise and worthy to learn from. But what I like about the teacher/student relationship is that one can (and ought) to disagree with a teacher. In my book on the Cosmic Christ I point out that the Christ is not just coming but has already come. In all of us, hopefully. But that is our life-long task, to welcome and offer hospitality to the Cosmic

Christ in all of us and to learn to recognize it in all things. Christ is the “light in all things” (science now teaches that all atoms contain photons or light waves). (The Cosmic Christ archetype is paralleled in Buddhism by the “Buddha Nature” idea.) Are institutions such as churches a hindrance or a help? That depends on the church, the culture, and the historical moment. When churches get corrupt, as Catholicism is evidently undergoing today, the Christ gets banished. That is why the church is “semper reformanda,” “always needing to be reformed.” But people need institutions--to come in out of the rain, to gather as a group at times, etc. So it’s not so simplistic a thing as “In the church or out of it” as “in a box or out of it.” As Leonardo Boff says, the question is: “Are we birthing (healthy) church or not?”

Q. It seems a Direct Path such as Harvey suggests is currently intersecting with the collective consciousness in a powerful way. Everywhere you look there are cultural manifestations of relationships with the Spirit, whether as literal as “The Passion of the Christ” and “The DaVinci Code”, or more mythical such as “The Lord of the Rings” or “The Matrix”. What are your thoughts on these?

A. We are living in a time of great spiritual hunger. Without spirituality our species will not survive. Without spiritual practice we cannot moderate our reptilian brains which are in fact destroying the earth and our species. Thus Harvey’s Direct Path is very much needed--and the other forms of meditation available to us. Our Wisdom University includes these as integral to all of its education for these very reasons. The cultural phenomena you allude to, the novels and the movies, speak to this need but don’t really offer ways of empowerment. You don’t learn meditation by watching a movie or reading a novel just like you don’t learn to be a football player without going on the field. Meditation is not a spectator sport. One participates. One learns a skill.

Q. Another Direct Path methodology that seems to be gathering significant awareness is the use of entheogens: God-releasing sacraments. I wonder if you're aware of Santo Daime and UdV and their use of sacramental ayahuasca, which seems to be like early Gnostic sects returning to life. This connects with the intersection of shamanism and the modern world, states echoed by the LSD experience such as "The Good Friday Experiment" described by Huston Smith. Is the entheogenic renaissance something to which you have given much thought?

A. I have been in a number of dialogs over the years with persons who have chosen that path. I think there are cheaper and more safe ways to undergo transcendence. For example, our "Cosmic Mass" (see www.thecosmicmass.com), which we have been celebrating for eight years, replaces the drug ecstasy with liturgy but uses the other elements of rave such as dance, dj, vj, rap, media, trance music, etc. to provide powerful worship experiences. A youth drug counselor from San Francisco brought 13 of her clients with her to a Mass we held in Oakland and on the way home they said to her: "This is the first time in my life that I've gotten high without drugs." I am interested in people getting high but without drugs. That has barely been tried of late because the churches are so flat. Religion is dead if it cannot provide healthy experiences of transcendence.

Q. It seems as if these questions gather towards some kind of end point: certainly another accelerating theme is prophecy, and not just your typical eschatological anxiety. Focus on indigenous prophecies and the significant uptake of the "2012" phenomena has become a serious matter of debate. Do you contemplate much on prophecies signifying the end of the world (or, more accurately, the end of the world as we know it, which is probably no bad thing)?

A. While there is something to learn from these ancient prophecies, I prefer operating out of the Jewish understanding of prophecy which is more conditional: “IF you bring justice to overcome injustice, THEN your tribe will survive.” Or as Rabbi Heschel put it, the primary work of the prophet is to “interfere.” We have to interfere today with the hypocrisy and lies and stupidity that parade as religion or as politics or as education or as economics. We can and need to build a world that works for everyone (including the more-than-human communities): That is what prophecy means to me: Building a world based on justice and compassion. WHEN we do that, our future will be bright. IF we don’t try, our species will continue its path to self-destruction and clearly time is running out on us. So the issue is conditional. Are we up to it? Do we want to survive? Are our ancestors counting on us? Are the children to come counting on us? Let’s get moving!!

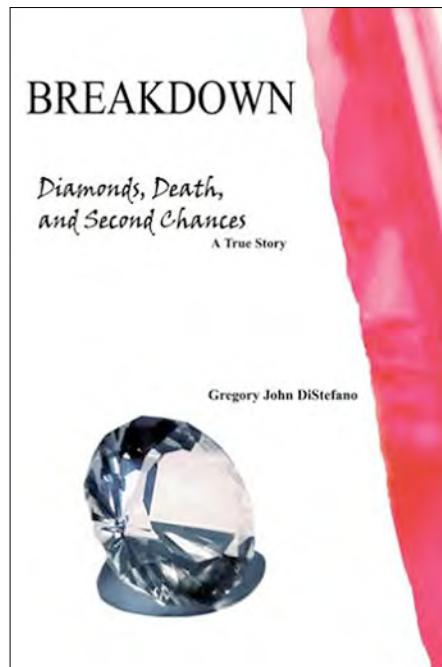
Science of the Soul

Gregory J. DiStefano

To wisdom belongs the intellectual apprehension of eternal things; to knowledge, the rational knowledge of temporal things. –St. Augustine

Rishikesh's distant shore looked neon with the amber-rose glow of late day sun against a deepening blue sky. Negotiating the narrow footbridge over the Ganges into town, we dodged a cavalcade of clomping ox-drawn carts, whizzing motor scooters, begging lepers, sleeping cows, running children, and voluminous mounds of dung which squished when stepped on.

Unexpectedly, such chaos gave way to an exotic *nirvana*. Beneath the rolling green foothills, the picturesque community surprised us with its bohemian sophistication and relaxed charms. Temples, both ancient and new, hugged



the riverfront. A perpetual stream of wandering, orange-robed *sadhus*, their faces raisin-baked, flashed a variety of carved walking staffs, some over seven feet tall, with extravagant flourishes at the top. Visitors and residents alike greeted each other, heads bowed and hands clasped together, weaving the word *namaste* into sentences with every opportunity. Beyond its double meaning as both 'hello' and 'good-bye,' the flexible greeting translates to, "the God in me bows to the God in you."

Sacred Hindi music perfumed the air, while acrobatic forest monkeys swung from low-hanging tree branches that canopied the street, delighting the crowds below. As dusk made way for one last glowing stand of violet-pink twilight, hundreds of candles lit the river, floating on Camphor leaves. They were offerings for the evening's *pujas* ceremonies. The otherwise blissful vignette was sullied by my knowledge that this was an alcohol free town; the sudden need for a martini pestering me like an angry mosquito trapped in my mind.

Here I was further indoctrinated into Eastern mysticism. We selected an *ashram* that offered yogic and Hindu philosophy lectures in addition to meditation and yoga. For less than the cost of a Big Mac per day, we luxuriated, by backpacking standards, in a cavernous room with two double beds and a private bath with pure, albeit ice cold, Himalayan water. The *ashram's* spiritual leader, a man in his nineties, resembled Mahatma Gandhi. He projected a calming omniscience and demonstrated his ability to do one hundred push-ups and knee bends, which were done daily before his swim against the Ganges current, even in winter mountain weather.

A test of faith stood by the front entrance. Hanging from a large metal barrel was a hand-painted sign that read: "Stone Floating on Water." Inside the container, padlocked by a wire mesh screen, a fist-sized rock lolled on top of water, unaffected by the agitated fuss I was making. Spiros laughed. "Why can't you just accept it?" Short of tearing off the cage to see whether the

stone was really floating, I shook the barrel as hard as I could, the padlock clanging against the side. Reacting again to my conflict over Baba's miracles, I was desperate to expose what my rational mind needed to consider a magician's trick.

Beginning at 4:00 each morning, bewitching Hindi music from the temple stirred us awake. Our daily routine consisted of yoga and meditation from 5:30 to 7:00 AM, followed by a 9 to 10:30 lecture on yogic lifestyle and philosophy, and then more yoga from 11:00 to noon. Afternoons were free to explore the pristine scenery, read, lounge, swim, or raft along the shores of the river, where simple, thatched-roofed homes were nestled among the abundant flora.



After the 5 PM yoga class, we ate dinner nightly in a dilapidated tinent-of-a- restaurant, whose Indian chef learned to cook in Italy and blended the two cuisines. The swirling scent of Indian-spiced, yogurt-richened pasta sauces filled the hut, and were ladled over superb, handmade pastas. And if we were in a swinging mood, we would cruise the only evening bar for a cup of steaming *chai*, before mandatory lights out at 10:00.

Neither Hindu nor Buddhist monks consume alcohol. To them it is poison that hinders spiritual progress by causing a break in conscious contact with the Spirit within. I thought of Western clergy. What was it that allowed—or maybe even caused—so many clerics and rabbis to worship the spirit in the bottle?

I shared my perceptions about Sai Baba with the *ashram's* teaching swami, who was also garbed in a long, straight, orange dressing gown and

what looked like a strand of wooden, pearl-like prayer beads he wore tucked inside. He was a willowy, Spartan man with gaunt eyes and intimidating, almost defensive energy that contrasted with his almost feminine body movements. With an edge of bitterness that betrayed the faintest of professional envy toward Baba, he provided a taunting explanation of *darshan*. “The guru,” he said, “simply acts as a mirror to reflect back what the devotee actually sees in himself.”

Stung by the same response I chose to ignore when suggested by Spiros, I asked, “Could this be why so many people saw only love and compassion in Baba, while I saw ego, arrogance, and manipulation?”

“That,” Swami snapped, “is for you to decide.”

Later that night, in discussing my conversation with Swami, Spiros asked me to reconsider my *darshan* experience in Germany. “If swami’s right about that; can you see any connection between Mother Meera and yourself, or, for that matter, between you and your mother?”

They were questions that I was too uncomfortable to consider.

“Yoga is a science of life.”

Swami conducted his yoga classes and philosophy lectures as if they were cadet training, but I admired his passionate dedication and was able to feel the warmth behind his rigorous, almost militaristic posture.

Ordinarily, I would have passed off such a claim as hogwash. How could this ascetic monk in the middle of nowhere know anything of value about a “science of the soul?” After all, I was the one with degrees from two Ivy League universities and years of hard-won lessons from the mean Manhattan streets. Yet, with each passing day, his teachings would strike chords of truth within me I never knew existed.

“Yoga is a search for the true nature of reality beneath *maya*, the veil of illusion,” he said. “It can only be achieved by delving deep within our own minds for the answers.”

This was the opposite approach to Western education, where we turn the mind outward to books for learning. In the West, we educate the intellect, the logical, linear hemisphere of the brain that processes math, languages, and science. But emphasis in the East seemed more aligned with experience, intuition, feelings, and an exploration of our inner being, which emphasizes the more holistic right brain.

“The science of yoga asserts that the mental and spiritual dimensions of life can never be scientifically measured, or even understood by the intellect. Consider how love can’t be measured by the intellect, but only experienced,” said Swami with defiance. “Intuition is man’s highest faculty, not his reasoning mind. On the road to enlightenment our minds must make a leap beyond rationality.”

This seemed to echo many of the same conclusions of modern science, only told from the opposite, Eastern mystic perspective. The vocabulary was different, and the emphasis on the heart and emotions was opposite from the measurement and rational analysis critical to science. But the ideas were the same and, at least to me, a profound revelation.

Swami fingered his wooden beads as he sat cross-legged in front of the class. “Thoughts are not abstract things.” This again mirrored the findings of physics. “They are energy.”

Several students in the group scoffed, but Swami was not deterred. “What we think creates our own reality,” he continued. “Thoughts create matter.”

For some in the class, this statement was too much. A distraught British teenager with spiked, blue-purple hair, multiple piercings, and dozens of black rubber bracelets thrust her arm upward in protest. “If that’s true,” she said with derision, “then why haven’t I created the wealth that I’ve always dreamed of?”

“But you have,” said Swami with a hint of mischief. “Through your anger and dislike of yourself and the world, you’ve created a wealth of sorrow, heartache, and disappointment in your life and in the life of those closest to you.” He extended his hand out toward her. “Negative thoughts—like fear, anger, greed, and resentment cause the mind to contract, which is a form of self-destruction. But positive thoughts, such as love, joy, and acceptance cause the mind and our life-experience to open up and expand.”

His audience enraptured, Swami struck again. “Fear manifests as anger, a major cause of mental, emotional, and physical disease.” This sounded just like Louise Hay’s assessment: that illness is often created by the mind through diseased, unbalanced thinking.

“Anger stems from feelings of rejection, disappointment over expectations not being met, and, at its ultimate root, from a lack of self-love or self-respect,” said Swami.

A hushed silence echoed through the room. “We have a responsibility to love ourselves, not only for the value of our own lives, but for the wake of destruction we leave when we don’t, that devastates the lives of others,” he continued. “Self-loathing is so all-consuming that it reaches out, like tentacles, drowning those closest to us. But there are healing solutions. Remember—to forgive is to set the bird free, only to discover that it was you in the cage.”

The couple of angry faces in the group scowled. “For anyone suffering from a lack of self-love; live a life of unconditional love toward all other people. Seek love of God through a strong, conscious contact; and render service to others.”

Swami’s voice got soft. “I’ll tell you a story.” He cast his eyes down and dropped his shoulders. “My father had always wanted me to have a career in the Indian army. He himself was a general.” He fingered his wooden bead necklace as his air of authority drained from him. “I tried that career for a

year, but I knew it wasn't my calling. When I told my father that I was leaving the military to become a Hindu monk, he was furious. We didn't speak for years."

I sat and listened intently, amazed that such stories were universal. Swami raised his head and glanced at the class, looking like a wounded child. "And so, to prevent self-loathing from developing in any human, never, under any circumstance, reject anyone, or tell them that they're inadequate or not good enough. We must always value people for who they are, not just for their successes or for the honor they bring to the family."

"Amen," said Spiros as he glanced over at me.

Swami sat up straighter, recollecting his composure. "Pain and suffering also arise from any form of obsessive-compulsive dependency, whether it's to another human or to material possessions." He raised an index finger to accentuate his point. "If you're seeking love, happiness, comfort, or anything else that is outside of yourself, then you haven't yet discovered that it all really exists within you."

A murmur of agreement rippled through the class. "Dependency takes the shape of many ghostly forms. Learn to become detached." He paused to build dramatic effect. "Sugar, work, caffeine, exercise, food, sex, computers, shopping. It can be as subtle as disco dancing."

I caught Spiros' eye, amused by the relevancy of Swami's example to our night-clubbing lives. "The high one gets from dancing lasts, at most, two days." Swami shrugged his shoulders. "Then a sustained period of depression settles in and one begins yearning for the next experience."

Later that night Spiros and I lied awake by candlelight, each in our separate beds, discussing the day's lecture. "In so many of Swami's examples I could see myself so clearly—in ways I'd never seen myself before. But I'm not sure I agree with his 'disco dancing' example." I lit a cigarette, even though smoking wasn't allowed in the *ashram*. "As you know, dancing can be a

transcendent experience. So, for me at least, I guess some of life's downs are a price worth paying for that kind of self-communion experience."

"Well, the Whirling Dervishes have always used rhythmic dancing to open portals to other dimensions." Spiros climbed over, took a drag of my cigarette, and sat on the bed next to me. "But what I think Swami's getting at is different. If those dance floor experiences aren't backed up with some real soul searching or inner investigation, then they can leave you empty, and disillusioned."

I took an extra long drag of the cigarette. "How would swami know about disco dancing, anyway?" I joked with mock suspicion.

A Mona Lisa smile formed on Spiros' face. "Maybe he was a teenage 'club-kid,' dancing the nights away in Calcutta's underground club scene."

As others sat in blissful, cross-legged meditation, my prayers were reduced to shameless begging for just one hot shower and a couple of ice-cold beers.

It felt silly performing contorted, stretching salutations to the sun before it even rose. The dark meditation hall was frigid with the autumn morning chill that swooped down the ice-capped peaks. I enjoyed many of the yoga postures, but not in the perfectionist fashion Swami imposed on us, and at such an ungodly hour, without the benefit of coffee. Although the high-pitched, sing-song Hindi music had a tendency to pierce my nerves, I could feel a glow of serenity when classes ended.

Once again though, I wanted to escape. Despite the bucolic scenery and the leisurely days sunning, reading, philosophizing, and rafting down the Ganges, I felt unsettled, anxious, as if gnats were trapped beneath my skin. The undefined nature of my relationship with Spiros closed the walls in further, pressured by the guilty secret that weighted down my backpack throughout the journey.

"You need to ask yourself why you're so afraid of intimacy," Spiros said for what seemed the hundredth time.

Although I always avoided responding, sometimes a childhood memory would play like a film inside my mind, like when I was eight years old on a family holiday with the McMahons and their three kids. We were heading to Washington, D.C., and the adults were debating the breaking Watergate scandal, a story which, based on the newspaper photo of a non-descript hotel, I neither understood nor cared about.

Eager for adventure, I raced to the front of the plane and bounded down onto the tarmac. Turning to watch the rest of the pack descend the staircase, my eyes, like heat-sensitive radar, locked onto something foreign. Something I had never seen before. Time stood still before my stomach caved in, giving way to a flood of pent up emotion I never knew existed.

They were holding hands. Mr. and Mrs. McMahan were walking down the stairs, holding hands. And through that most simple of connections, something I had never felt before came over me. It felt so foreign, yet so warm and reassuring, so natural and right.

The epiphany revealed that mine was not a demonstrative family. Although we all loved each other, we had little capacity for expressing affection, each family member beyond the reach of the other, like insects trapped in amber. The words 'I love you' were never spoken, and attempts at hugs and kisses were always awkward and uncomfortable. By that time, already a bit of a skeptic, I had decided I would never marry.

Since Spiros and I had not, by this time in Rishikesh, slept together in weeks, he attempted to re-ignite some passion in our relationship. But the result was the same as always. When he hugged me, my shield went up as I felt myself shut down. Unlike so many of my anonymous sexual escapades, with Spiros I wasn't able to let go, couldn't surrender to the experience. The fear of losing control left me alienated, locked inside myself.

“Unconditional surrender to God is the single most important action for all humans.”

So began Swami's discourse on God and man. Again, I was confronted with this threatening proposition that Sai Baba first introduced me to. Several agitated students shared my resistance and clamored for clarification.

"Unconditional surrender is necessary for the dissolution of our destructive, self-seeking ego personalities," said Swami, echoing Baba's teachings. "Only after surrendering can we stop our futile efforts at trying to control everything and everybody in our lives. We use our self-will in an attempt to control, which only leads to unhappiness, frustration, resentment, and, all too often, self-destruction."

Swami sat cross-legged on his lecture pillow, his students in a semi-circle around him. "Surrender is the realization that all is God. It means letting go of all sense of separation." He stroked his short, close-cropped beard in contemplation. "We don't surrender to anyone or anything that is separate from us, for God is not separate from us. By surrendering to the God essence within us, the irony is that we surrender to ourselves."

A couple of students began to squirm. "Without surrendering, there can be no liberation from the prison walls of ego," Swami warned. "We are at its destructive, self-seeking mercy."

The Gothic British teen twirled her eyebrow ring. "I don't understand. How are you defining God?"

"The whole universe, including everything in it, is considered to be a gigantic being, and God is considered to be that being. We, as people, are just waves in this universal ocean. We are a tiny part of this whole, individual and yet not separate from the whole." Swami relaxed his posture and spoke softly. "God is not an external entity administering authority. God is our own Higher Self, within us. You must learn to find and worship God inside yourself."

"If God is within me," said the British teen, "then why am I unhappy?"

“How can man be unhappy?” Swami’s face drooped. “There’s an infinite bliss and beauty in nature. How can a fish be thirsty? We live in an ocean of God. There’s no reason for our spirits to thirst. We must reconnect with the whole, with nature, and with ourselves.”

Even as a child I rebelled against the traditional Western conception of a male father figure who sat in the sky. But since I never replaced this void with a concept I could believe in, I limped along as an undecided, apathetic agnostic. The God of traditional Christian, Judaic, and Islamic understanding—a judgmental, wrathful entity that meters out punishment for our sins—now seemed primitive. A new God was now emerging for me, the idea of communing with a Power within myself more emancipating than that of any Western religion.

Recognizing parallels between this Hindu philosophy and the discoveries of physics, I began to perceive God as an intelligence, or consciousness, inherent within each and every atom throughout the universe. Maybe, I thought, God is an omnipresent energy throughout our bodies, devoid of judgment, and there for us to use for either our own evolution or destruction. If so, then maybe hell is not some physical place where we go after death for our infractions against God’s laws. Maybe hell is a state of mind we experience when we choose to learn through the stick instead of the carrot. I suddenly realized that God doesn’t punish us; we punish ourselves when we act against our conscience.

Another student asked Swami to clarify what he meant by our transient, ego personality. “Our ego can be likened to our shadow or artificial personality,” he responded. “Whereas ‘I’ in reality refers to the infinite, eternal Soul, most humans have become confused, and instead believe ‘I’ refers to the finite body, mind and personality.” He leaned over and drew a picture of an onion on his over-sized pad. “When we peel away the layers of the artificial ego personality created by our life experiences, we

come to realize that the characteristic of the eternal soul, beneath the ego, is pure bliss and needs nothing for its completion.”

“Life works on many levels and dimensions, many of which our limited mode of consciousness cannot yet perceive,” said Swami, echoing the insights I gleaned from modern science.

The teaching again forced me to entertain new possibilities. After all, we accept the existence of electricity, as well as microwave ovens, radio and television waves, and other frequencies that carry sound and information, even though we can’t consciously perceive them with our senses. We also know that there are other ‘colors’ within the spectrum of light that we can’t perceive, like ultra-violet light. So how difficult was it to imagine that there might really be higher or finer levels of consciousness—maybe even angels and other, higher dimensional forms?

To my cynical surprise, other realms of existence I had always dismissed as ridiculous presented themselves for reconsideration.

“Science can create Hiroshima, but it will never create peace. In fact, science is unable to state, or even realize, the purpose—the goal of life,” said Swami during the next morning’s lecture. “Humans are evolving toward a level of consciousness where we will, in essence, become ‘God-Men.’”

A couple of students covered their mouths to mute their laughter. I was not as cynical. Although I found some of Swami’s teachings a bit idealistic, much of his philosophy was an exciting extension of the principles of physics.

A young Asian man with glasses and slight, stooped shoulders, who had said nothing to date, raised his hand. “Man made the quantum leap from ape to human consciousness,” he stated with an Australian-English accent. “So why is it so difficult to believe that man will next make the quantum leap from human to cosmic consciousness?”

“Well said,” congratulated Swami as a ponderous silence descended over the class.

“Surrender, Dorothy!”

Just before the conclusion of our three-month Indian adventure, we stayed for the first time in a hotel that had a television in the room. “I wonder what’s on Indian TV?” Spiros grabbed the remote control from the bed stand. Ironically, *The Wizard of Oz* danced across the screen.

“This is freaky.” Spiros flinched. “It’s like *The Twilight Zone*.”

We sat cross-legged on the bed, searching for cryptic messages. “How similar to Dorothy we are,” I said, “traipsing through distant, exotic lands in search of an all-powerful wizard.”

We watched as Dorothy and the scarecrow linked arms and skipped down the yellow brick road. Then Spiros said, “And Dorothy’s companions. They reflect the ways we’re all searching for the wisdom, love, and the courage to face our fears.”

“Ohmigod.” I smacked my leg. “Maybe the wicked witch of the West symbolizes our ego. And in contrast, Glinda, the good witch of the North, represents our spiritual essence—or our Higher Self.”

“Ahhh, very good.” Spiros upped the ante. “And it’s our own ego that tries to enslave us within its dungeon, and rob us of our divine capacity.”

“Hhmm, I like that.” I grabbed my journal and started scribbling notes. Then a scene flashed before us, one which seemed fun and dreamy as a kid but now it had a whole other meaning. “So then it’s our ego that tries to break our conscious contact with Spirit through our addictions,” I said, pointing to the scene, “represented by the field of poppies that puts the cast to sleep.”

“Bingo.” said Spiros. “And only Dorothy’s Higher Self, Glinda, can awaken her.”

Later I say, “Maybe that’s why—right here,” I point to the screen, “Glinda belittles the witch, telling her, ‘Be gone. You have no power here.’”

Spiros takes his eyes off the screen for the first time and says, “Hhmm...and only when Dorothy’s at the end of her line does she find the Power within her, not with some fearsome wizard, which turns out to be a myth.” Spiros trails off at his last word. There’s a sobering realization that a childhood fantasy had been shattered.

I drop my pen. “And, when Dorothy asks Glinda why she didn’t tell her about the power of the slippers earlier, Glinda responds with a simple truth: ‘Because you wouldn’t have believed me before.’” I pause and Spiros and I look at each other. “Like all of us, Dorothy had to learn for herself.”

We watch on in silence as Dorothy awakens in her home and delivers the film’s ultimate message: “If ever I go wandering in search of my heart’s desire—I know that I need to look no further than my own backyard.”

Spiros curls his fingers against his cheek in thought. “So, home is where the heart is.”

“Oh, I have goose bumps,” I said, jumping back against the headboard. “The whole thing is brilliant!”

It’s these moments and conversations when I realized why we were together—for learning, validation, and encouragement.

When the film ended, we sat in silence through the rolling credits. “What are the odds,” I said, bringing us both back into the room, “that seeing this was just a random coincidence?”

“I’m beginning to think there’s no such thing as coincidence.” Spiros lit a cigarette, walked over to the window and gazed off into space. “It’ll be interesting to see how all this plays out once we get back to the states.”

Reprinted from *Breakdown: Diamonds, Death and Second Chances* (iUniverse, 2005) with permission of the author.

Gregory J. DiStefano is a spiritual explorer, truth-seeker, and national award-winning marketing consultant for clients that have included Piaget, MSNBC, Hugo Boss, and diamond giant, De Beers. Author's website: www.breakdownbook.com

Pan On Terrorism

Trebor Healey

Pan has his arms crossed
And his brows knit
Appalled by the antics
Of sexless men
Feckless and fuckless

A paradise full of virgins
What crap
(As absurd as Christian monogamy)
The word is many things
And if it's fucking you're after
This is it, assholes

It's spelled out in genitals everywhere you turn

There are no virgins or whores in heaven
For those who've fucked and good
Know that paradise is nothing
The vanishing point of sexual release

Emptiness

Oblivion

A jewel proffered by the cumming Buddha

So get a clue, angry young men

The jewel is in your boxer shorts

It grows from out of your own mud

It's name is Prostate

And it is legion

Now put down your explosives

Drop your pants

And serve god and country

Drag Queen Dharma

Trebor Healey

A lotus flower
above the mud
her practice is her heals

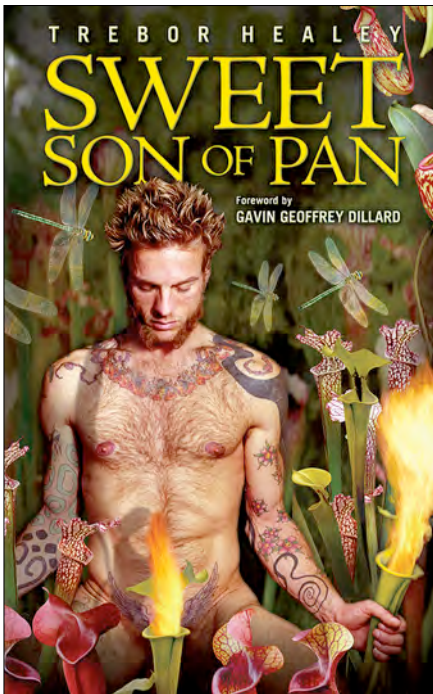
Reprinted from *Sweet Son of Pan* (Suspect Thoughts, 2006) with permission of the author.

Trebor Healey is the author of the 2004 Ferro-Grumley and Violet Quill award-winning novel, *Through It Came Bright Colors*. He has published poetry in more than 50 books, reviews, journals and zines. Trebor lives in Los Angeles, where he is working on his second novel, *A Horse Named Sorrow*. Website: www.treborhealey.com

Sweet Son of Pan

Sven Davisson

Sweet Son of Pan, Trebor Healey
(Suspect Thoughts, 2006, 135pp, \$12.95)



As Gavin Geoffrey Dillard observes in his introduction, some of the most powerful spiritual poetry has its roots in the erotic—Whitman, Blake, Rumi, Mirabai. Like his forebears, Healey is a shaman of the word. This collection is a fitting homage to the randy cloven-hooved demigod. The poetry invokes the god into the reader (the shaman's unwitting co-conspirator). The god then reaches down, drawing forth the most carnal, and coaxes it, like a serpent, to the crown. Quickly

one realizes that spirit is spirit—a continuity of being from the chthonic to the divine.

Healey brings Aleister Crowley's resurrected Pan of a 100 years previous into the twenty-first century. His "Pan" is a direct successor to Crowley's "Hymn to Pan." Crowley wrote, "(Io Pan! Io Pan!) / Devil or god, to me, to me, / My man! my man! / Come with trumpets sounding shrill / Over the hill! / Come with drums, low muttering / From the spring! / Come with flute and come with pipe! / Am I not ripe? / I, who wait and writhe and wrestle / With hair that hast no boughs to nestle / My body weary of empty clasp, / Strong as a lion and sharp as an asp— / Come, O Come!" Healey, for his part, raises the call anew: "Oh Pan, o-pen / me! / Coax my kindness out of the highrised city / of competing cocks at sunrise of greed / skyscraping city cumming rules and regulations / Coax me buttsex beautiful and bodacious out of the beehive of behavioral boroughs..."

William Burroughs wrote, in his *Apolcalypse*, of a cry heard by mariners off the coast of Tuskini: "The great god pan is dead." Now that Trebor Healey has proven himself to be the god's sweet son, I have every suspicion that news of Pan's death has been greatly exaggerated.

Portfolio

Sven Davisson

New Orleans, 2006



“Jackson Square & St. Louis Cathedral”



“French Quarter Door, post-Katrina”



“Rebirth #1”



“French Quarter Mary”



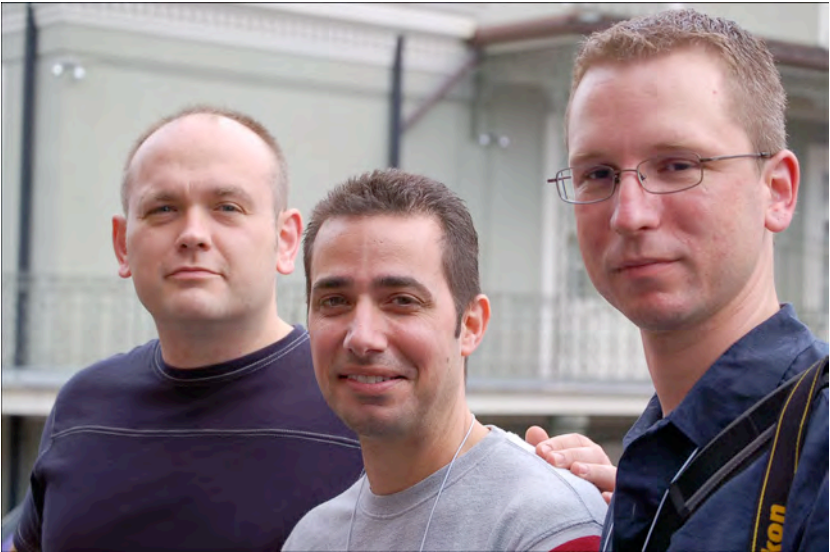
“French Quarter Street”



“Rebirth #2”



“Marie Laveau’s House of Voodoo, Bourbon Street”

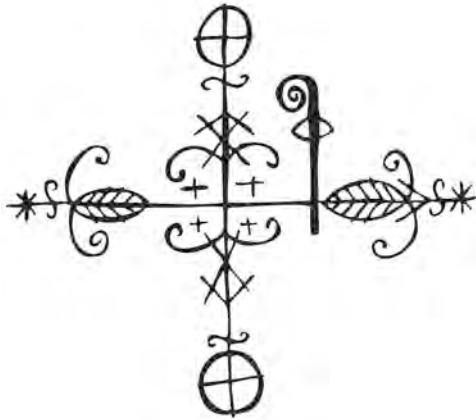


Kelly McQuain, Salvatore Sapienza & Sven Davisson
Saints & Sinners Literary Festival, New Orleans, 2006
(Photo: Jim McDonough; courtesy www.queerwriters.com)

The Mystery of Voodoo

Fazilla Shujaat

Hour after hour, the drumming and chanting carries on as a goat and a small pig have their throats cut... the blood is sprinkled over the worshippers and the animals are then thrown into a pool of brown bubbling mud, as many believers join, jumping into the pond as well.



This is the climax of the voodoo ceremony at the Plaine Du Nord, 300 kilometres north of the Haitian capital Port-Au-Prince. Thousands of voodoo believers come each year, all believing that “the saint” will help them. This particular ceremony is in honour of Ogou, the spirit of Fertility and the Earth.

The most important part of voodoo is the actual religious ceremony. After starting out slowly, the voodooist work them selves up to a spiritual and religious frenzy, using such things as dance, music and liquor to help inspire them. The real question - is Voodoo a religious act or a satanic following; as



“Priest, Ouidah, Benin, West Africa”

Peeter Viisimaa

voodoo is often charged with being fatalistic, superstitious and involving devil worship.

Voodoo is a mixture of Catholicism and ancient African religion and its faith holds that there is one God, the creator of the universe. Subordinate to this God are the Loas, lesser deities or saints who act as messengers between a voodoo practitioner and God. Voodoo's fatalism focuses on how the Loa control the world, wealth, sickness, childbirth, rewards, punishment and many more.

Voodoo believers accept the existence of one God. Below this almighty God spirits rule over the world's affairs in matters of family, love, happiness, justice, wealth, and revenge. The practice of voodoo involves the blessing of a Voodoo doll to contact the spirits directly, requesting fulfilment in love, finance career matters, and more. It is still believed that the main reason why people turn to practising voodoo or witchcraft today is because more and more people are dissatisfied with traditional religious structures and are seeking deeper and more meaningful relationships with divinity through alternate methods.

Voodoo, which means 'Spirit Of God', is a system of beliefs originating in Africa. It has over 50 million followers worldwide and also flourishes in Brazil, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Cuba. It is known to be one of the world's oldest religions, which have been around in Africa since the beginning of human civilisation. Some people estimate these civilisations and religions to be over 10,000 years old.

It's been said, voodoo is a powerful mystical practice that can bring great gifts and rewards to anyone who believes in it. Followers consist of those willing to place his or her destiny in the hands of the spirits and await waiting their call. The most popular part of voodoo is the Voodoo Doll, which is used to represent the spirit of a particular person. Primarily used for the purposes of control, dolls have been used to request a change in

attitude or intention; influencing an individual to act in accordance with one's wishes. The dolls have also been used to bring harm to those who seek revenge against their enemies.

Most perceptions of Voodoo rites and rituals proclaim it to be evil or malicious, but not many people know the positive aspects of voodoo, such as healing, nature, love, and joyous celebration spells. Voodoo spirits can also bring harmony & peace; birth & re-birth; luck; happiness; and health. For those who have been looking for a solution to a difficult problem; for someone who is trying to sort out a conflict; return a lover, or even become rich in a more than alternative manner - LOA is waiting for your call.



“Statues, near Ouidah, Benin, West Africa”

Peeter Viisimaa

The Elijah Tree

Cynthia Masson, Ph.D.

She began as some speck in the universe, breathed from unknown intention. What did she know beyond the vastness of silence? She knew nothing. Nothing. And she loved it. She could love nothing without thought. So there she was, a speck of love, loving nothing until she bumped into something and thought. She thought she was no longer nothing in her sensation of something else. The two nothings thought about each other and about themselves and then nothing was lost forever. No one knows if this really happened since no one has stopped thinking since then.

Jael pressed her forehead against the glass. She watched for Elijah. Would she recognize a prophet? Presumably a prophet wouldn't be hanging upside down from monkey bars. She closed her eyes and prayed for a sign. Nothing.

Elijah climbed higher and his mother watched, nervous. He was six years old and still too young to understand her fears. What had he experienced of the terror of this world? As far as his mother knew, he had endured severe pain only once and the fear of loss for five tormenting minutes when he was four and had wandered inside a tree, losing sight of her. He had crawled into a crevice formed by old roots or coincidence of growth and had been lodged there until a woman, whom his mother knew then only as a stranger, found him and pulled him out. Perhaps he had not been as frightened as his

mother. She had thought her son had been snatched up by the current in those few seconds that she had turned away from him. Why hadn't he answered when she'd called out? Had he thought, even at that age, that this was some type of game?

“Elijah! Elijah!” Nothing.

And the stranger had noticed his tiny red shoe and had coaxed him into a position from which she could pull him out of that tree, feet-first, like a breech baby, covered with remnants of brown shavings from a tree's womb.

This is how Elijah was born twice and why he did not fear death.

The speck, Jael, Elijah, and his mother: each has a life; each has a name. The speck's name cannot be spoken. Jael's name speaks of defiance and ascent. And Elijah's name was chosen by his mother, who wanted a strong biblical name, despite the claims she had made, on more than one occasion, not to be religious. His mother, whose name is Shira, is infinitely younger than the speck, three years older than Jael, and thirty years older than Elijah, but linked inextricably with each through time. This is a story not to be read once. These words are nothing without you.

She was born out of song. That is what her mother told her. It had been a difficult birth, searing pain worse than with the first child—a girl too who had died within six months—and her mother feared that this child, about to be born, would die in the struggle or that she herself would die in the effort to give life and leave the child without a mother. So she sang. She sang all the prayers that came to her mind—mixed amongst the cries of pain, under her breath and screaming aloud, words that she did not even understand, lost melodies of her childhood, pleading to God in the only way she knew at that moment to save her life and that of her child. And Song was born.

Her mother has not prayed since, afraid of doing something wrong, without the intensity of that longing she'd had when she had sung Song into life. But she still sends her thanks silently and knows that there is a God, and she has tried, over the years, to impress a belief in the divine on her daughter.

Song, however, has a mind of her own. At three years old she threw a tantrum over her mother's decision to dress her in a blue dress with black socks. She wanted blue socks and struggled furiously on the bed, holding onto the bedposts with her fierce, tiny hands, refusing to leave the room. Her mother made the mistake of giving in, of digging blue socks out of the laundry, hand-washing them quickly, and drying them on the dashboard of the car on the way to Song's grandmother's. Song wiggled her damp toes under the dinner table and knew perfectly well why this night was different from all other nights. She had taken her first step toward independence, even though she did not know that word at the time or even recognize a victory. She just fell asleep, in her socks, fists clenched in her dreams of resistance.

Song never felt like she belonged to her parents. And her parents never quite understood that. She believed, as she progressed through her teenage years, that all her friends felt similarly alienated. But this proved untrue. If your rebellion is limited to a certain time and place, if, in the end, you follow the rules, meet the expectations, and grow up to marry someone who can give you children and a large house, then all is well. But if you marry an unknown artist or, worse, an actor, or if you follow your own dream and leave the artist and his house behind, then you have done something tantamount to dishonouring your family since stories of you cannot, or will not, be used to fill-in otherwise empty conversation.

Of course, Song's mother would draw different conclusions. She would state simply that parents know what is best for their children and that

Song, unlike other children, had always revelled in defiance. As a consequence, during their duty-bound but infrequent visits, Song and her mother generally sat on either side of the kitchen table, eating carrots and dip, in pursuit of a discussion that would offend or anger neither one nor the other. On all but the most occasional occasion, this task met with failure; thus passed the untold years that were, without their knowledge, carrying them toward Elijah.

Without expectation, in a moment that was to turn her world upside down, Jael uttered a prayer to God without knowing. Prayer, after all, is nothing but a devout intent directed toward the divine. She knew this intellectually. She had analysed that very line in her own work. But in opting for theory she had renounced faith. Or so she thought. And, thus, not thinking this monumental utterance, not analyzing it, indeed not even noticing it, she released a prayer. And God answered it with the divine equivalent of a laugh.

So just at the moment that Jael abandoned her words for a walk to the rocks, Shira reached a conclusion. She would take Elijah and leave. Sometimes a conclusion is made and the repercussions are not manifest for years to come. This was to be for Shira. She knew nothing at that point. That is, she knew nothing about the future; she knew only that moment. She picked up Elijah and headed toward the park by the beach. If she had only the summer here at the water's edge, she would not waste another moment.

Thus Jael and Shira walked toward one another—not literally at this point. This is, after all, the construction of an elaborate metaphor. But their figurative paths were about to cross and at that point a prayer would be answered. Neither woman knew this, but they each contained a spark about to become fire, swept free of its ashes.

Shira built a castle for Elijah out of sand. At four years old, he had no patience for the detail of structure, only a fierce delight for destruction and reformation. For her part, Shira found solace and much needed distraction in watching Elijah's hands push their way through the sand. When he wanted water in his beach pail, Shira led him down to the waves.

She noticed a woman sitting alone on one of the outcrops of rocks. But her attention paused only briefly here and then passed back over the water to rest again on Elijah. He carried a half-filled bucket to his castle and splashed its walls with double-handfuls of water, calling "*Rain!*" in his small voice.

After this rain came a sandstorm, and after that Shira fit Elijah back into his tiny red shoes, picked him up, and walked toward the park. As they reached the grass, he struggled away from her and headed for the swings. She followed and pushed him slowly for a while, but he was more interested in hanging from the seat with his arms, dragging his shoes through the sand, creating his own momentum. So Shira, accepting this latest display of her son's independence, turned away then to watch a dog running between the trees and across the park. She could not see its owner. She wondered then if she owned Elijah, knowing that if someone saw him alone in the park they would assume he belonged to someone nearby. Thus it was the subtleties of language and movement that distracted her long enough to distort time.

"Elijah..."

She smiled and turned. "Elijah? Elijah!"

And then she called *Elijah* with a conviction his name had never before possessed.

Jael, still moving her hands across the smooth granite, responded without thought. She saw the woman who had called "Elijah" running toward the water. But the surface of the water was smooth, untouched,

admitting no evidence of intrusion. Jael's recognition followed her gaze from the water to the sand to the grass to the trees. She could see nothing that had not been there before. She had heard nothing after the woman's cry.

But it was here, in the absence of the senses upon which she usually relied, that scent occurred to her. As Shira reached the shoreline listening for Elijah's voice in response to her calls, Jael followed scent. She felt that Elijah, whoever he was, had been drawn to a place of sensation—to a place not visible, to a place without sound, to a place of smell and taste and touch. She moved toward the trees. At first each tree seemed solid in its own presence, but then one revealed another. At the base of the trunk of that one was a small red shoe.

Shira had lost sight of Jael, if she'd even noticed her at all once she began her search for Elijah. She had scanned the park and saw nowhere to hide and assumed the most attractive element in the landscape was the water. But she did not think as her child. She thought of drowning, of losing sensation, rather than bathing in it.

Jael reached into the crevice of the tree, her face pressed against its body. She could feel the child's limbs contorted, the small body too large to remove without tearing. She coaxed down one leg and then the other, then held both at once and pulled with two hands, supporting herself by her head on the trunk.

Elijah, bleeding where wood had torn at his skin, re-entered the world without a cry. He blinked and looked at her.

Jael laughed. What more could she do? She held in front of her a young boy who smelled of wood shavings and baby shampoo, who did not reveal a trace of fear or concern or annoyance.

“Elijah?” she asked, as if she had pulled any number of boys out of trees and needed to affirm this one’s identity before proceeding. It’s not that she didn’t know him. She simply needed to name him.

He nodded. She picked him up, and he wrapped his arms and legs around her as she walked toward the beach. When he looked away from her and saw his mother, he too began to laugh. And Shira, moving toward them, heard nothing but this laughter so that when they met on the sand, when Jael, also laughing, passed son to mother, Shira recognized in this woman a familiar tenor of voice without words. She breathed relief, kissing Elijah, watching Jael.

Eli too was here yet not here. His memories were here, as if lying in wait, in the minds of those he had known. He realized this—that they waited for him—but he could not return, not now amidst the lies that he had been living for so long. But in moments like this, just as he touched his breakfast spoon to his mouth or sprinkled his toast with the cinnamon sugar of his childhood, he remembered his sister. Sometimes in his recollections he remembered her as Shira, but most often he remembered Song—Song, who had always spoken to him as if he understood more than he knew; Song, who had taught him to walk; Song, who had without knowing taught him to love, who had given to him the one woman he knew he could not have. Even now, thinking of this, he felt his body flush. He should not have allowed his desire to overtake his promise.

What of his promise to God to meet and marry a pious woman? What of his entire life prior to his departure? And what of the lies that have become his current truth? What would Song think if she knew?

But he had seen his truth in a vision, and he needed to understand its consequence now. After all, was this not what he had always sought—not desire, not love, not even divine prophecy. He had sought truth, and certainly truth was greater than all. Certainly, therefore, his lies would be

justified by his final truth. So he finished his cereal and his toast and waited to hear what he had claimed, for years, to already know.

Shira, relief unending, then lay beside Elijah. She waited the night. Sometime before dawn, she fell into sleep. She could feel him breathe. She dreamed of the past out of fear. And the next day she kept him within whispering distance, needing more than a visual presence for comfort.

She thought too of the stranger, her son's saviour (or perhaps her own). Shira could hear the laughter still, a sound permanently imprinted, having made room for itself amongst her fears without permission or intention. Shira wanted to find this woman, to thank her.

The next day she returned to the park, hopeful. But she found no one. After a week of such attempts, she came to the conclusion that the woman's presence in the park on the day that Elijah had disappeared had been merely a coincidence. And then, one day, Shira entered the park with no thought of the stranger, and the stranger found her. This time, they talked, seated on the rocks, with Elijah between them, safe from the water, hidden from the trees.

Later that evening Jael, who had accepted Shira's invitation for dinner, arrived with a bottle of wine. Their conversation moved along practical, incidental topics punctuated with compliments of food and drink, both before and after Elijah had been put to bed. Not until the silence of space between dinner and dessert did either woman make the offer of an intimate detail to the other. It was Jael who, after commenting on Elijah's name, described the origin of her own. And Shira, in response, told the story of how she came to defy translation.

"My mother calls me *Song*," she said then, finally and quietly, refilling Jael's glass. "But my name is *Shira*."

"Shira," said Jael. She paused. "Some people call me *Ya'el*."

"Ya'el."

For several seconds they said nothing after their names. They sipped their wine, thinking of questions that neither could yet ask without intrusion. So when they did speak again, the topic changed several times before settling onto favourite books and films until Shira, noticing the time, left the table to get the dessert.

Jael liked to think she had rescued Shira's child, but then she was certain that Elijah would have been found, unharmed, eventually, whether she had been there at the rocks that day or not. Indeed, there were few places in the world he would have been safer than waiting for his mother inside a tree.

"Does he climb trees?" she asked Shira, who placed two glass bowls on the table.

"Elijah? No. He's only four. He climbs furniture."

They paused again, smiling.

And then Shira, having moved in her mind from Elijah to the tree to the beach, asked Jael what she had been doing that day on the rocks.

"I had to think. Or I had to avoid thinking. I just needed to sit at the water."

"Do you pray?" Shira asked.

"Sometimes. Do you?"

"Not by choice."

Years before and for years on end, Shira's mother, whose name is Chava, worried about Song. Song had seemed different than other five-year-olds, different than other ten-year-olds and, by fifteen, different from other teenagers. Chava did not make the error of comparing her daughter's youth to her own; she understood the passing of time and the necessity of difference between generations. But she had always sensed a wave of urgency in her daughter that she did not sense in other children.

Song's hands, she saw as they developed, were strong, uncompromising. Who, you might ask, would not admire strength in her own child? But this was not strength opposed to weakness. It was, to Chava, a strength opposed to upbringing, to the ability to speak and act properly. What did her daughter need of strong hands if she had a strong mind, a stronger voice? Song's words could carry her.

But what Chava did not understand, and what Song innately did, even as a child, was that words come from somewhere other than voice. Words could be carried in gesture. Words could be formed without utterance. Words could be translated with a touch of hand to brush to paint to paper. Create with these hands, Song knew, and language would surrender voice.

Elijah knew this woman who had pulled him out of his cave, and he knew about caves. He had seen them in a book, and then he had found one near the swings. But the caves he had seen were made of rock, and this one was made of tree. He knew the woman, but he could not remember her name. He knew her a long time ago. He could not remember when. He could not remember much of his time before this time with his mother. And even that was difficult now and then.

When he looked at this woman though, he knew her. She laughed and he knew her. He thought she was laughing because she had found him again after all this time. But then she called him *Elijah* and this confused him. That was not his name. And even though he could not remember his name, he thought he might if someone spoke it to him. She did not. So, at the sound of *Elijah*, his more recent memories drowned those of the time before.

This woman carried him along until he saw his mother and then he laughed. I know you, he thought. I found a new place, he thought. I want to show it to you, he thought. But he couldn't show it to her because suddenly his mother held him too close and thanked the laughing woman too many

times, and he was no longer certain who he was or who they were or what anyone was supposed to be doing.

Late on the night of her first dinner with Shira, after the words, after the wine, Jael watched the sky over the water, remembering a similar sky from years before when the moon was near full and the clouds hovered close as if part of a tangible landscape. On that night, she had been lulled by wine and a cool breeze and opened herself to vulnerability, confessing her desire to a friend. She spoke; she waited. The friend moved briefly away and then turned once again to Jael. “Kiss me,” she had said. And they did. She was twenty-two, and this was the first kiss that had had any significance to her. She had kissed people before; she has kissed people since. But that night, that kiss, is the one that remains with her.

She stood, silent and unmoving, envisioning her life as a series of sensory images out of which she had constructed her last ten years but that she had neglected to frame. She sensed boundaries in danger of being reached, in danger of being touched, waiting to be crossed. She thought of her other life, then recoiled at the prospect that she could think of herself as having two lives—one that awaited her return, one that called to her out of nowhere to remain still, responding to the pull of sensation in landscape.

She ran her hand along the railing of her balcony and tasted the air.

Elijah sat on the kitchen floor as his mother prepared the dinner. The woman who had pulled him out of the tree was coming to visit. He liked her and wanted to see her again.

“Where does she live?” he asked.

“Up near the university.”

He knew where that was. He had been there with his mother. They had ridden on the bus, and he had watched the baby geese on the pond there three times now.

“She knows me,” he said.

“Yes. She found you in that tree,” his mother answered.

“Did she know me before?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Did she know you before?”

“No.”

“But she knows us now.”

“Yes. We’ve met now.”

“Do you like her?”

“So far.”

“Will you like her later?”

“Probably.”

Chava ran a finger across the scar on the back of her right hand. The scar had formed years ago in response to hot bacon grease. She had given into temptation and in return received a warning from God. She had not thought of it as such at the time. It had been only a painful and avoidable accident. But later, contemplating death, she also contemplated signs.

She wanted another child. It had been two years since death had found her first daughter. It was time. She would ask her husband that night. Then she could anticipate. Anticipation was much easier than despair.

By October Chava was pregnant. Everyone around her prayed for her and the child. She neglected prayer in search of signs. By the eighth month she knew with certainty that her child’s hands would never be scarred. She could feel those hands inside her. This was a sign.

She tried to find a name for her child, looking through name dictionaries for hours at a time, long before this child was born. But no name came to her until the day of the birth, until she sang to sleep the child she hand sung into being.

Shira knew that red was Elijah's favourite colour. He had red shoes, a red blanket, a red coat, hat, and boots for the rain. When offered the choice, he chose red.

When Shira first brought home the red canoe, Elijah ran in circles around it, dancing and clapping. He wore his red lifejacket around the house for three days until the rain let up and they could finally take the canoe out onto the water. On this first voyage, Elijah sat perfectly still. After that, he became more daring, peering over the edge, asking Shira questions. But sometimes he would fall asleep under a blanket and Shira would paddle softly, enjoying the calm, thinking about her life and her son.

She wondered again what would have happened if he had died on the day that he had hidden in the tree. What if he had wandered into the water after all, alone, without his little red lifejacket? Her life would have ended along with his. She thought then of the first child that her mother had lost and asked herself how she, Shira, had ever been born to a woman who might well have died years earlier along with her child.

Elijah sat in the tent that Jael had built for him on the front lawn out of garden chairs and old sheets. This was the second time Jael had visited. The first time had been the night she came for dinner. On that night his mother had sent him to bed early, and he had fallen asleep listening to the ups and downs of Jael's voice, not able to hear her words. Now, he could hear her again, from his tent, and he moved closer to the door to hear her better. When the wind moved the sheets, making that watery sound he liked, some of Jael's words were lost to him. She was telling his mother about her work, and he learned that she would be working here only until the end of June.

Elijah did not know how far away June was, but he thought from the way Jael said "only" that she would not be here for long. He knew that he and his mother would be here until the end of August. That seemed a long way away, even though he did not remember the order of all the months.

“It is only the middle of May,” his mother said to Jael.

Elijah lay on his back looking up at the blue sheet. It looked like the sky. Only he could touch it. This sky was soft. And it moved against his fingertips. But it didn’t have stars.

“What’s his name?”

“Elijah.”

“Isn’t he sweet!”

Shira looked from Elijah to the cashier and managed a smile. She could tell that Elijah liked the attention but not this woman.

“I’m not sweet,” he told her. The woman laughed.

Shira wanted to leave the store. She felt unsettled, anxious to be home.

In the car Elijah asked again when the end of June was and then said nothing for the rest of the drive. Shira wondered if he could sense her anxiety. She too had been counting the weeks today.

When they arrived back at the cottage, she found a piece of blue paper wedged between the screen door and its frame.

“What is it?” Elijah asked.

“A note.”

“From Jael?”

“Yes.”

“Read it to me!”

“Dropped by to say hello. Wondering if you want to go on a picnic tomorrow.”

“Phone her, mommy. Say yes.”

So she did. And a plan was made. Jael would bring the food. Shira would transport the three of them out to the island across from the beach in the canoe. Elijah would wear his lifejacket and sit still on the voyage. He promised.

Elijah went to bed early that night. Shira read the note again, admiring the handwriting, and then put it away in her desk.

It rained all morning on Saturday. Elijah cried. Shira tried to soothe him with his favourite Saturday breakfast and assure him that they could go on a picnic another day, but she too was disappointed and, she assumed, unable to hide this from him.

At noon Shira answered a knock at the door to find Jael in rain gear holding a picnic basket under an umbrella.

“Ready?” she asked.

“We can’t go in this weather.”

“I know.”

Jael spread a blanket on the living room floor. She pulled out bread and cheese and fruit. She’d brought wine and grape juice. She’d brought jam and honey and a colouring book with crayons. She helped Elijah colour a picture of a tree and laughed with him about the day she had found him two weeks ago at the beach. She coloured the trunk; he coloured the leaves.

“Why are the leaves red?” she asked him. “Is it Fall?”

“It’s not falling. It’s like when you found me.”

“The leaves were red?”

“They were on fire.”

“Really?”

“On the inside. This is the inside of the tree.”

“Oh. Were you scared?”

“No. It was good fire.”

“Like a campfire with marshmallows.”

“No. Like angels.”

“Angels?”

“You know, like angel fire.”

Jael glanced at Shira. “Maybe I ought to look inside that tree more carefully next time.”

Shira poured herself a glass of wine and said nothing.

On certain days, when the light fell through the curtains and onto the bed in a particular way that Chava could not name but could certainly recognize, she would move from her love for her second daughter back into the love of her first. She would end, in mid-sentence, a lullaby to Song, and close her eyes in fear, in panic, in guilt. Some days she could stop herself in time. Sometimes she could talk herself into knowing that her love for this new daughter did not necessitate forgetting her love for the other. But other times the crushing would come, the suffocating weight that sent her rocking into pain. And in these times, she could see her daughter’s tiny body, could see the distortion of colours that caught not in Chava’s eyes but in her throat, colours that turned into convulsions of breath and fear and bile. And on one such day, in an effort to breathe again, she screamed.

Song awoke, screaming then too. And Chava’s husband, home by chance, came into the room and took his daughter into his arms.

“You’ve frightened the baby,” he said to Chava. “This has to stop.”

“This has to stop,” Chava repeated. “Yes. This has to stop.”

She tried. She even saw a doctor, one who recommended another one whom she saw several times. And then, for a while, the convulsions remained in the past.

Then one day, months later, when they threatened to return, Chava held in her hands and then brought to her chest a locket containing a photograph of her first daughter. She felt for this daughter a fierce love and asked aloud for her forgiveness.

“I didn’t know. I didn’t know,” said Chava.

But forgiveness never came. For just at that moment Song, old enough now to walk and thus old enough to move suddenly from one place to another without warning, startled her. And Chava dropped the locket.

“Let go, sweetie,” she said to Song, who had grasped onto the locket immediately.

But Song would not let go.

“Let go!” said Chava, whose feelings had moved by then from desperation in her pleas to her first daughter to anger with Song.

Song gripped the locket tightly.

“Let go!” Chava said and then waited.

“Go!” Song yelled, throwing the locket as far away from her as her little arm and hand could manage.

And though Chava might have otherwise been tempted to remain angry, she was instead so shocked at hearing Song’s first word that she forgot momentarily about the locket and marvelled at what must be her daughter’s above-average intelligence.

“What did you say?” she asked.

“Go!” Song said again.

And though neither Song nor Chava knew this at the time, a spark had been set free.

Rain. Always it rained in her life on days that would mean something. This rain was heavy, unexpected, and complete with a thunder that aroused her. Jael sat on her balcony, breathing purposefully, seeking something she did not yet know. How could it pour down in such torrent without warning? She wanted it to run in rivulets over her. She wanted to press her body, face down, into the mud, craving the water that would pulse against her back, caressing the earth that would cradle her breasts. She wanted to catch her breath. She wanted to be touched. She wanted to be touched by this rain.

She questioned how she could want even more yet again. Perhaps desire, even frustrated desire, was more tenable to her than her work. She lay on the floor, remote control in hand, listening to the same song over and over again, as loudly as the speakers would permit before distortion set in. She hoped her neighbours were not home. Her body was aching from her run on the beach the day before and in its incessant need for something beyond itself.

She thought about that day, years ago, when she was ten or eleven and saw those two people together. She had been playing hide-and-seek, squatting down behind some bushes in front of a basement window. She knew that she should not be watching and that she could have crept away without being noticed, but she didn't. She watched and listened. The sounds fascinated her more than the actions. She had been taught about sex by the teachers at school and by her mother. But no one ever told her about the sounds. That is what she wanted now: sound, someone crying out desire for her.

Instead she allowed lyrics not her own and never addressed to her to distract her from thinking of anyone in particular.

And so they played. These were summer days that allowed for leisure different than that of the dark, short hours of winter. Sometimes Shira and Jael would sit on the rocks or rest in the sand, chatting about anything that came to mind while Elijah worked on his sandcastles nearby. He seemed oblivious to the annoyance of insects that emerged by the water as the sun began to set. He liked to hear Jael and his mother talk. Everything seemed safe to him then—no need to get in the car and move to a new place. He liked the beach and the park and the cottage. He liked to play in the sand. He liked this place, and he liked Jael. And he knew that she had believed him on the day he told her about the fire.

Shira had forgotten about the fire within a week of that rainy afternoon picnic. Elijah was a child with a vivid imagination. Like father, like son, she had thought that day. After all, had he not seen fire in her painting all those years ago? But this was the extent of her musings. She could not allow herself to think beyond this reasonable explanation. Besides, Elijah had not said anything else about it. Now she had her work and her friendship with Jael to distract her from the places in her past into which her mind might have chosen to wander if her summer world were limited to Elijah alone.

Jael too was distracted from her life back home. She had come here to teach but had found, in addition to students, two new friends who enlivened her time outside the classroom and was finding, as a fortunate consequence, that her time in the classroom was also much more animated than it had been just a few months earlier at her former place of employment. All seemed well. She was curious about both Elijah and Shira, and she hoped the remaining weeks would move slowly enough for her to have time alone to spend with each of them.

And above it all, through it all, beneath it all, the speck waited until the time was right for all involved to know without knowing. Then she finally asked aloud in silence, *"Who am I to deny the call of the prophet?"* And thus the call began with its answer.

At his birth, Shira argued with her mother over the circumcision. Chava pleaded with her long after the eighth day, but Shira refused to have Elijah circumcised. Shira's father said he agreed with her mother and did not say much beyond that. Chava, however, was convinced, and thus reiterated, that God's wrath would rain down upon them. She reminded Shira of the prayers that had brought her into this world, suggesting that she owed God something in return.

"The prayers were yours, mother. They paid for themselves."

“Just how much reproach can one child take?” Chava levelled at her.

Shira did not answer. She had known her mother would equate this choice with the others that she insisted Shira had rashly made. What could one argue against an impending litany of poor choices? Instead, she went home to sit in the rocking chair beside Elijah’s crib, drinking hot tea out of an old, chipped cup. Why did her mother understand every action as a moral choice, every gift as something that must be paid back?

She knew he was a miracle, her little Elijah. How could she cut away even a small piece of a miracle? He could make his own covenant with God, on his own terms, when he was ready. She gave him a name. That was enough of an imposition on his life. He might be expected to live up to it.

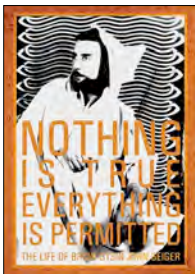
Elijah heard his mother calling him but he could not call back. He was in his tree cave, watching the fire. He felt like someone was tickling him but not enough to make him laugh. When he looked up he could see little stars sparkling. He thought it was night in his cave. But then the stars turned into little flames that reminded him of the candles his grandmother would light. He watched until the flames became a fire large enough to make him feel warm but not hot enough to burn him. He could smell something like cinnamon on Saturday toast.

Then Elijah saw something that he did not understand. He was trying to reach it when hands pulled at his feet. And then he was pulled out of the light of his cave into the light of the sun. And he blinked.

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Reviews

Nothing Is True—Everything Is Permitted: The Life of Brion Gysin,
John Geiger (Disinformation Company, 2005, 320pp, \$27.95)

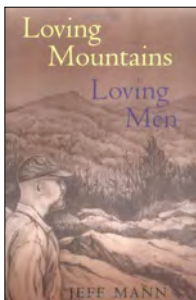


Brion Gysin is one of the most important artist still awaiting his proper place in the canon of 20th century art. John Geiger's new biography is one significant step toward placing Gysin in his rightful position vis-à-vis his contribution to modern art. As he made his way through the past century (1916-1986), he traveled in the most creative of circles. He was one of the first expatriate discoverers of Tangiers and resided in the famous Beat Hotel in Paris. Despite his own marked creativity, at present, he is best known through those he influenced—William S. Burroughs, Mick Jagger, John Giorno and Genesis P-Orridge to name but a few. Burroughs, an early and life-long friend and collaborator, called Gysin the only man he ever respected. To Gysin go the credits of (re)inventing the cut-up technique and the Dream, or flicker, machine. He was expelled from the Surrealist movement by none other than Andre Breton himself and this early set back may have helped derail the trajectory of his artistic career. There is no doubt that Gysin was an artistic genius, but he was also conflicted throughout his

life—torn between his painting and the pull toward being a novelist. After finishing Geiger’s book one cannot help but be left with the afterthought that Gysin may have squandered a grand career through this indecision. Geiger spent years researching his subject and this shows through the thoroughness of the details he includes. His project was supported by Gysin’s literary executor, Burroughs, and he was allowed unfettered access to Gysin’s papers. Geiger successfully avoids the pitfalls of one who has such a wealth of detail at their fingertips and uses the minute details to affect. All else aside, Gysin lived a fascinating life and this well-written biography is a, for its part, fascinating read—blending facts, legend and not a little bit of juicy gossip. Geiger has produced the first and what might prove to be the definitive biography of the enigmatic Mr. Gysin. In 2003 Thames and Hudson issued a monograph of Gysin’s artwork, *Brion Gysin: Tuning Into the Multimedia Age*, to which Geiger contributed, and the book makes an excellent companion to have at hand while reading the biography.

Loving Mountains, Loving Men, Jeff Mann

(Ohio University Press, 2005, 248pp., \$19.95)



While in New Orleans this spring, I joined a dozen, or so, other members of the Suspect Thoughts and Velvet Mafia extended families for dinner. I had the pleasure of sitting beside Jeff Mann and his partner, John. Over muffuletta and jambalaya, we talked of rural connections and similarities that transcend regional specificity and geographic disparity. Several weeks after returning to my own rural New England, my copy of *Loving Mountains, Loving Men* arrived. Sitting on the deck with the book, across a beautiful Maine summer weekend, was like a continuation of the conversation begun in the 80° plus

heat of New Orleans. As the title implies, Mann loves the Apalachia region where he grew up and chose to return. His love of the region and its rural life comes through on every page of the work—woven with threads nature, food and family as these are the elements that blanket us in memory. The title also evidenced a dichotomy that plays out through the book. Rural areas are often not the most welcoming of places for one who is different. The tight-knit connections required to stabilize small communities all too often work against the unwelcome intrusion of the unexpected, the unknown, the queer. This division between the place one loves and not always feeling welcome in return is something Mann has wrestled with. Over the years, he has come to resolve many of these tensions for himself. The remaining ones, he tells us he will learn from. “What I hope my words will do,” Mann writes, “is reduce that tension for others, those who might see themselves reflected here, those who might have the strength not to retreat into an easy simplicity but rejoice instead in a difficult complexity.” Mann is also a lover of nature, botanical tidbits and asides re-occur throughout the book. He is also a pagan and Wicca and the image of the Goddess nuance and balance his Scottish temper. The work is a unique blend of memoir and poetry, combining short personal essays with captivating poetry of place and people. In others hands the combing of prose and poetry to this extent might not work as well as it does in *Loving Mountains, Loving Men*. With Mann’s articulate skill, the thread of his life, the men he’s loved and the place he loves ties the whole together into a work greater than the simple sum of its parts. Mann has lovingly tended his garden of words and provides the reader a bountiful harvest.

Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels, Hella Winston

(Beacon Press, 2005, 224pp, \$23.95)



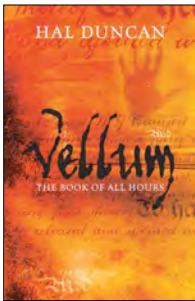
Hella Winston, a doctoral candidate at City University of New York, gives one a remarkable glimpse into a closed world in *Unchosen*. As a handful of others have attempted to do in the past, Winston sets out to understand the lives of those within the Hasidic communities of New York. Unlike her predecessors, she goes beyond the Lubavitcher Hasidim, the more open of the various Hasidic sects, researching the conservative and isolationist Satmarer Hasidim. Winston departs from others by setting her sights specifically on those who rebel in various ways against the cultural and social constraints of the communities within which they were raised. Her work is fascinating in the way it follows the lives of several rebels that Winston met during her investigations. The small cohort of subjects differ in their means and expression their rebellion as well as their success and the relative reactions of community and family. The Satmar community is one of the largest, if not the largest, sect of Hasidim in the world. The majority of whom are concentrated in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. Winston chooses this community as her subject matter and does manage to gain some degree of access to rebels seeking in various ways to leave the community or live as they wish while remaining in the community. Winston does a good job intertwining her subjects' stories while, at the same time, setting them into their social and historical context. One does wonder at times, if she places too much unanalyzed credence on her subjects' assertions about their communities. This misgiving is overshadowed, however, by the overwhelming sense of control evidenced by Winston's corollary investigations. Ultimately Winston's book gives an interesting

new glimpse into the world of the Satmar and, and even more interesting look at those with the personal courage to attempt to resist the compulsions of their society and heritage.

Vellum: The Book of All Hours, Hal Duncan

(Del Ray, 2006, 480pp, \$14.95)

Review by Craig Gidney



Biker chick Phreedom searches for her missing brother Thomas in the US of 2017. Both siblings have recently become more than human, and as such, they are supposed to enlist in the endless, epic war between angels and demons that goes on through time and space. Thomas wants nothing to do with the war, so he hides in various pockets of time. He does so by becoming a one of the rebel gods in world mythology—Tammuz, the consort of the Sumerian goddess Inanna. Phreedom must become Inanna herself, in her quest to find her brother. The two of them are pursued by the various factions of angel/demon war. Both brother and sister travel through space and time (or the Vellum), grafting themselves on myths and tales, in attempt to rewrite them and save themselves. Meanwhile, a student from modern Edinburgh, Guy Reynard, finds the sacred book of All Hours, (an atlas of the Vellum) and sets off on his own journey, where he meets Phreedom/Inanna and becomes Thomas/Tammuz's lover.

The Vellum is the secret history of the world that can be changed by the unkin, which come in two types. The angels represent order and want to rewrite the Vellum a tale of glorious good and remake the world(s) in their image; they are reminiscent of the angels in Tony Kushner's *Angels in*

America. The demons want to control the Vellum, as well, and resurrect old pagan worship, complete with blood sacrifice.

It's all told in a whirl/mash up of source myths, short vignettes and longer meditations that often happen at the same time. Ritual sacrifices to gods share the stage with cybernetic avatars and nanotechnology. Duncan's main point is that mythology underpins most of the world, and there are tangential extrapolations on the war between West and East (its worse in 2017), homophobia, and racism. *Vellum* is written in the present tense, with first and third person narratives in a dense, poetic style. Duncan's writing is vivid and obscure, grand and vulgar, sensual and aloof. You catch wisps of Joyce, Burroughs and other postmodernist writers in his style.

Vellum is hard to follow, and Duncan doesn't have full control of his material. As a result, there are redundancies (Duncan will often retell the same story again) and some of his riffs on politics, society, and reality are fragile and self-indulgent. It is also a little too long and unfocused. *Vellum* comes alive with the sharply drawn characters and Duncan's immersion into the alternative dimensions of his created worlds. His language practically dances across the page. At its best, it's like the author has swallowed Graves' *The White Goddess* whole and it spills out of every pore. There is much to admire in this beautiful, wild mess of a novel.

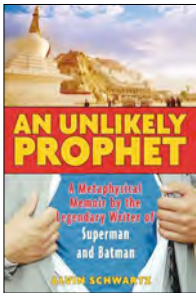
A Scarecrow's Bible, Martin Hyatt

(Suspect Thoughts, 2005, 201pp, \$16.95)



Martin Hyatt's debut was a refreshing surprise and not at all what I had expected. *A Scarecrow's Bible* is a mature work that in no way hints that this is the author's first novel. Hyatt craftily avoids the inevitable pitfalls of the freshman. In a house trailer in rural Mississippi, Gary, a married Vietnam veteran, addicted to drugs, haunted by memories of the past, is on the brink of collapse. Just when he thinks the dream of another life is over, the unspeakable happens. He falls in love with a frail, ghostly younger man who reminds him of youth, beauty, and the possibility of a life beyond the prison he has created for himself. *A Scarecrow's Bible* centers on the moment when the universe gives one precisely what one needs at the moment one least expects it. His characters are subtle, but complex. Hyatt masterfully conveys their various (and at times inter-related) conflicts. He avoids didactic hedav-handidness, drawing his characters through action and interaction with the adeptness of a seasoned novelist. Kudos must also go out to Suspect Thoughts Press for finding another treasure in the American literary wilderness.

New & Notable

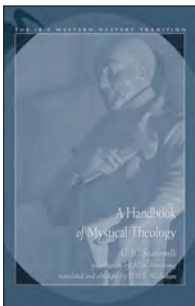


An Unlikely Prophet: A Metaphysical Memoir by the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman, Alvin Schwartz (Destiny Books, 2006, 218pp, \$16.95)

His seventeen years writing Superman and Batman comics had not prepared Mr. Schwartz for Thongden, the seven-foot Tibetan *tulpa* who one day showed up at his door. Or had it? A *tulpa* is a being created by thought that takes on a life of its own. Thongden explains to Schwartz that the recent death of his creator—the Tibetan mystic who had thought him into being—meant that Thongden would need to find another source for the thought energy to which he owed his continued existence. This memoir recounts the author's profound investigation into the shifting nature of identity and reality—a personal journey where elements of synchrony, inspiration, accident, and magic lead to the eternal now and the possibilities of time, space, form and identity which have their origins in each moment of our lives.

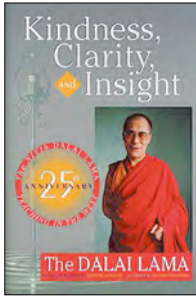


Abrahamadabra: Understanding Aleister Crowley's Thelemic Magick, Rodney Orpheus (Weiser Books, 2005, 200pp, \$19.95) When Looking Glass Press (Sweden) issued the first edition of *Abrahamadabra* in 1995, it marked a significant contribution to the field of thelemic, or Crowleyan if you will, magick. Now Weiser's has issued a new edition of Orpheus's modern grimoire with an added forward by Lon Milo DuQuette. Orpheus, a practicing magician himself, succeeds in presenting Crowley's magick as a workable system. Orpheus may be familiar to some as a member of the occultural band The Cassandra Complex. "Remember always," Orpheus writes in his introduction, "magick is a subtle and curious thing and often works in ways you do not expect—but it *always* works. Every magical act brings a result..."



A Handbook of Mystical Theology, G.B. Scaramelli (Ibis Press, 2005, 176pp, \$14.95) Scaramelli (1687-1752) was a Jesuit priest who spent 30 years in active ministry as a missionary. He was the author of five books, one of the most important of which was his *Il Direttorio Asceutico*. First published in Venice in 1754, the work was not translated into English until 1913. Nicolas-Hays has now added this title to their growing reprints of important mystical titles issued under the Ibis Press imprint. In addition to the facsimile reproduction of the 1913 edition, the book includes a new introduction by Allan Armstrong, Prior of the Order of Dionysis and Paul. This abridgement of *Il Direttorio Mistico* is a foundational work for people seeking the Western contemplative tradition that leads to the Spiritual Marriage. Step-by-step, Scaramelli describes mystical theology in general

and then moves on to how contemplation works upon the ming and body of the aspirant.



Kindness, Clarity and Insight, The Dalai Lama (Snow Lion, 2006, 278pp, \$19.95) In 1981, the Dalai Lama and Jeffrey Hopkins, his translator, puzzled the publishing world by giving this important, first book of teachings to Snow Lion, at the time a struggling start-up publishing house. Now the same press has brought out

a hardcover 25th anniversary edition of this first North American teachings. Despite the numerous titles that have come out bearing the Dalai Lama’s name since its first publication, *Kindness, Clarity and Insight* is considered his “heart message” to the West—a foundational key to understanding his other work. The new edition includes an enlarged photo section that adds previous unseen, archival color images. Also included is a substantial new preface by Hopkins that gives a fascinating look at the Dalai Lama’s first American tour.



The Moon of Wisdom: Chapter Six of Chandrakirti’s *Entering the Middle Way*, translated under the guidance of Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche by Ari Goldfield, Jules Levinson, Jim Scott and Birgit Scott (Snow Lion, 2005, 528pp, \$24.95) Chandrakirti was a seventh-century Indian Buddhist philosopher who is revered for his interpretation of the

Nagarjuna’s teachings on the Middle Way. This book is a lengthy explication of Nagarjuna’s seminal text *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* and provides access to the Buddha’s ultimate teachings on reality. Also included in this volume is the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje’s elaboration on the meaning of Chandrakirti’s verses.